

Chapter one

"Who are you? Where are you?" he asked walking toward a lit up room.

"Come find me" the voice called out to him

"I'm trying, but I don't know who you are! Do I know you?" he asked, standing in front of the doorway

"Yes you know me, please find your heart," the voice called to him once more until he entered the lit room, looking around, however, he found the light being too bright to see who it was that was beckoning him.

"I have my heart, who are you?" He questioned, getting frustrated

He heard a lilted laugh, and then another riddled answer. "I am your heart. Yours forever," the voice replied just before he woke up.

"Oh man! That's the third time this week," Draco muttered getting up for the day. He headed to his own large private bathroom to shower, then got dressed putting on his expensive robes before heading downstairs to find his parents already into their daily routine.

Lucius Malfoy glanced up from his Daily Prophet, giving his son a look of disappointment "Son," he muttered before continuing to read his paper once more.

"Good morning father," Draco sighed sitting down in his usual place that was across from his father

"Would you like some tea?" Narcissa enquired to Draco

"Yes mother," Draco answered taking the cup that his mother offered to him

Lucius cleared his throat, "It seems that you had gotten an invitation to attend those twins' birthday party along with a letter

from Severus explaining why,” Lucius announced, his voice cutting through uneasy silence.

Draco sat his tea cup down in a huff, “I hate those two! They never took my hand last year, and they tormented me most of the time...,”

“Seems to me son, you were also tormenting them as well; especially the girl at Snape Manor along with young Crabbe and Goyle,” Lucius reminded his son

“But they started it...,” “WHAP!” Lucius slapped his Daily Prophet down onto their marble end table heatedly.

“I do not care who started it! You will attend that party young man! It seems those twins had practically invited all of the Slytherins to attend it, considering a few members from their own house as well! Even if you cannot stand those twins, Severus is your godfather, and they invited you there in respect toward him! So son, you will be coming along with us to buy something for the girl, I nor Severus expects you to give anything to the boy, but the girl however, was practically forced to get you a belated gift from Severus, and you will do the same in kind! Do I make myself clear?” Lucius demanded his question to Draco

“Yes sir” Draco answered without hesitation

“Good,” Lucius simply said picking up his Daily Prophet once more. “It seems that some wizarding homes are getting enquiries,” He informed them while scanning through a section of the paper.

SNAPE MANOR

“No Harry! Don’t put that in yet!” Hally shouted her warning to her brother

“BOOM!” “Sorry Hal,” Harry apologized while Severus sat in their main living room parlor, listening to them until...

“HEY DAD!” “And here we go” Severus chuckled, watching both twins scramble into the parlor

“Could we go into the forest?” they both asked him at one time

“Yes, but stay within your boundaries that I have put up for you two,” Severus reminded them

“We promise!” the twins grinned taking off outside

The twins headed up the path leading to the forest, Harry took a deep breath while he grinned; it was the first time that he ever felt more at home.

Hally gazed at him curiously, “Harry, are you all right?” she asked

“Yeah I’m fine Hal. I really feel like I belong here with you and dad,” Harry answered

“You do belong here Harry. Your family,” Hally grinned

Harry looked back at the manor as they continued to walk, “Dad really hides his easy side of him at school,” he spoke

“Yeah I know, but don’t say anything to the other students. Dad likes to keep his appearances up with them you know, to keep them on their toes,” Hally giggled

They went on into the forest, staying within their boundaries; until they stopped in their tracks at a sight before them...a houseelf was standing at least three feet in front of them.

Harry gave a glance at his little sister, “Uh Hal, is this one of our houseelves?” he enquired wearily

“No it isn’t Harry,” Hally answered, keeping her eyes on the creature

The unknown houseelf beamed up at the two, “Harry and Hally Potter! Such an honor it is!” it exclaimed

“Who are you?” Harry and Hally both asked in bewilderment

“Oh please forgive me twins who lived. I am Dobby! Dobby the houseelf,” Dobby announced to them both

Both twins crossed their arms. They both started to get an uneasy feeling about the houseelf’s presence. “Why are you here?” they both questioned the houseelf at the same time

A look of fear spreaded up the houseelf’s face before their very eyes, “Dobby came to warn you both, to not to go back to Hogwarts,” Dobby explained, his eyes round as saucers.

“I’m not staying away from Hogwarts,” Harry replied with a snort

“Neither am I. I’ve been at Hogwarts since I was an infant,” Hally pointed out, giving out a snort as well

“But bad things will happen if you two go back!” Dobby exclaimed to them both

“You can’t keep us from going back, our dad works there,” the twins stated, keeping their ground.

“Then Dobby has no choice, for Harry and Hally Potter are so good!” Dobby cried out taking off in a run, and slipping by the twins quickly toward the manor.

“Hey! Get back here!” The twins shouted, running after him.

They got as far as the entrance to the sitting room, “SPLASH!”

“CONNOR! RAVEN!” Severus’s voice boomed out at them. Both twins skidded to a complete stop. They looked down at Dobby watching him pop out.

“But dad...”

“No buts! You both know better, no potions for three days! No charms for three days! Do you understand?” Severus demanded

“Yes sir,” the twins answered at once, sighing in defeat until Screech popped in

“Master sir, there was a different houseelf here moments ago, is he new?” Screech asked

Severus whirled around in surprise. “What!” Severus cried out in shock

“That’s what we was trying to tell you dad, it wasn’t us, it was a houseelf that got you with that pail of water,” the twins rambled out

“All right, all right calm down you two I believe you,” Severus replied with a sigh. “I am sorry you two, I thought you both were being devious as usual again. Don’t forget to get ready for your birthday party, and I did receive a reply of acceptance on the invitation from the Malfoy’s, they will be arriving before the other’s are expected to arrive,” Severus informed them

“Malfoy will be here? Darn, we were hoping that he’d decline” They mumbled

“Yes, I understand, but remember; you both promised me that you would mind your manners...even if we are having your birthday party several weeks early.” Severus replied

“We know dad,” Hally groaned

“We’ll keep our promise, and wait until we’re back at Hogwarts,” Harry commented with an evil grin, Hally let out a snigger

“I am not hearing this,” Severus ranted with a wave of his hand

“Don’t worry dad, we can tolerate Malfoy for a couple of hours,” Hally giggled over their dad’s comment

Harry, after hearing his twin sister’s words, decided at that moment to tease her.

**“Yeah Hal, until you get older. Then you’ll really tolerate him.”
Harry sniggered**

Hally let out a gasp, before turning on her brother. “OOO! I could just!” Hally cried out slapping air as a demonstration, except they all heard a loud slap connecting Harry’s cheek. “SLAP!”

“OUCH!” Harry yelled out while Severus watched the scene begin in front of him

Hally’s eyes went wide with shock, “Oh gods! H-Harry?” Hally asked, then seen anger written on his face

“Why I ought to!” Harry seethed slapping air next “SLAP!”

“OUCH!” Hally shouted, and was just about to retaliate when Severus stepped in

“Bloody hell! Upstairs, the both of you!” Severus boomed.

The twins headed up to their private parlor with Severus following behind them.

“I want you both in your own chairs, and stay there until I return.” Severus ordered, and then headed downstairs to make a fire call.

Both twins sat in their seats away from each other. They both gave each other glares.

“You slapped me!” Hally cried out a minute later

“Well you slapped me first!” Harry retaliated less than a second after his sister’s remark.

Suddenly the war between them was on; there was slapping noises, they clinched their fists and yanked down, then pinched their two fingers together imagining in their heads that they were actually pinching their sibling.

“Get off my hair!” “Ouch, stop pinching me!” “Ouch!” “Ow!”

Severus walked up the stairs with Dumbledore listening to the constant shouting, walking into the war.

“Enough!” Severus boomed out at the twins, he watched them jump in their seats. He turned to Dumbledore waving his left hand at the twins.

“Well? Can you explain the events that we had just witnessed?” He enquired to the wise old wizard then heard the twins yell out once more

“LET GO OF MY HAIR HARRY!” “YOU LET GO OF MINE FIRST HALLY!”

“Connor! Raven! I said enough!” Severus roared out his order while Dumbledore started to chuckle

“Calm down Severus, calm down.” Dumbledore gleamed “Wand-less magic is a wonderful thing to see, especially at a young age.” He added

Both twins scrambled out of their seats, running over to him “Wand-less magic?” they asked with wide eyes

“I can’t take much more of this” Severus muttered, shaking his head in misery

“A very rare gift, but it does exist. With some practice, they will be able to control it without any problems...actually they didn’t seem to be having any problems with it from what we have witnessed” Dumbledore explained in full detail

“This is all I need right now, twins who would be able to put me in my grave before it is my time!” Severus yelled out. “I should have run the other way when I signed on as father with these two little demons!”

“But dad, we love you” Hally blinked her eyes innocently at his

“Yeah dad, we couldn’t have picked a better person to be our father” Harry spoke out next with the look of innocence as well

Severus muttered curses under his breath, "I had to adopt twins" they only heard before the twins started to cackle into laughter.

"If you both are quite finished, you can go get ready for your birthday party, and go down to lend a hand on making sure everything goes well" Severus feigned an irritated sigh before he and Dumbledore walked out of the twin's private parlor.

"And you both are not to say a word about this to anyone," Severus called out as he and Dumbledore headed back downstairs.

Both twins looked back at each other quietly, until they both broke their own silence.

"I'm sorry Harry," "I'm sorry Hal." They heard each other's apology come out at the same time before they started sniggering

"Come on Harry, let's go get ready," Hally suggested

Harry was already standing in front of his bedroom door, "I'll race you Hal. See who will be ready first, you or me," Harry grinned

Hally made a beeline to her bedroom. "You cheater" she grinned going into her room and closing her door at the same time as Harry closed his.

The twins came downstairs slipping their robes on just before they headed into the main living parlor, finding the Malfoy's already present.

"Here they are now, the two twin Gryffindor's" Lucius commented stiffly until his wife gave him a pleading look on not to start with them

"Hello Mr. Malfoy" Harry and Hally greeted through clinched teeth before they sit down on their favorite sofa. They looked over at Draco, who looked back at them gulping.

“Relax Malfoy, we promised not to do anything to you,” Harry grinned

“Yeah Malfoy, we certainly wouldn’t break out promise with our dad” Hally grinned as well. “By the way, your scores on Potions; did you pass?” Hally asked the platinum blonde boy

Draco looked at her as though she went mad. “I thought you would know from your father Potter, but since you asked I scored fairly well” Draco answered

Hally leaned on the right arm of the sofa “Still needs tutoring dad,” Hally commented

Draco was about to make a comment when Severus spoke out “I couldn’t agree with you more on that Raven.” Severus replied

“Professor...” “Whatever it takes to raise Draco’s scores will be most appreciated Severus” Lucius intervened then gave his son a stern look, daring him to make a scene.

A scamping noise came from the hall, getting everyone’s attention. “Uh-oh” the twins muttered before seeing whatever it was that made the noise come in

“Harry!” Hally cried out leaping up from the sofa in shock

“Quick! Grab it Hal!” Harry exclaimed as the chase was on

They cornered the creature in the corner of the parlor; Harry scooped it up swiftly, struggling to keep it from trying to escape.

“Hold still you little critter!” Harry shouted

“Why is there a bush pixie in here?” Severus demanded

“Experiment!” the twins answered, concentrating on their task

“Now Hal!” Harry yelled holding the pixie down while Hally pulled out a vial from her robe pocket

“What on earth?” Narcissa asked in bewilderment

“Hold it still Harry!” “I can’t hold on much longer! This thing is really struggling here!”

“The table! Put it on the table Harry!” Hally cried out while the others watched the two.

Hally opened her vial out, revealing a dropper, and putting it up to the pixie’s mouth “Open up you little...got it, let it go now!” Hally exclaimed

Harry let the pixie go. They watched it bounce all over the main parlor room. “Wee hee hoo!” the pixie squeaked, Harry and Hally high fived each other “Score!” they laughed evilly

“That is so cool!” Harry laughed

“Wicked!” Hally laughed in return

“I’d say that potion is ready” Harry commented

“Uh-Oh!” Hally cried out seeing the pixie bounce out and back into the main Parlor.

Harry caught the creature with ease, feeling it pant in his hand “All right Hal, give it the counter acting one” Harry replied while Hally pulled out another vial, giving the pixie the counter acting potion

“All right you two get it out of here” Severus told them watching them leave the room

“Look out first years” they heard Hally blurt out with a giggle

Lucius kept his eyes at the main parlor entrance. “Severus, what was that potion?” he questioned

“One of Raven’s newly made up potion Lucius. The girl has one devious mind just like her brother” Severus answered him just before the twins returned, sitting back down

“Pixie’s gone” they sniggered simultaneously. Draco let out a loud gulp

“We told you to relax Malfoy” Harry sighed

“Yeah, it isn’t for you, it’s for the first years” Hally sighed as well.

The grandfather clock chimed the hour in the hall. Severus glanced down at his pocket watch. “It’s almost time for the other guests to arrive...just a moment. Where are your hatchlings?” Severus questioned the twins

“Waiting in the ballroom dad,” they both answered

“Good. Then everything will be fine,” Severus commented when the doorbell started to ring.

“Raven, Connor; you two know what to do. Lucius; you, Narcissa, and Draco will come with me to the ballroom.” Severus replied leading the Malfoy’s to the family ballroom.

Both twins quickly took on their role as host and hostess, each taking a turn to answer the front door, and leading their guests to the ballroom further down the main hall. When their first guest arrived, however, they both answered the door at the same time. Blaise stood in front of her parents, outside the front door of their home.

“Happy Birthday Harry, Happy Birthday Hally” Blaise greeted them with a grin

“Hey Blaise, glad you’re here” the twins greeted each giving her a high five.

“This is my mum and dad...they had a hard time believing me when I told them that we were the best of friends,” Blaise announced

“Hello Mr. and Mrs. Zabini” the twins greeted the light-brown-haired girl’s parents

“Blaise, your mum is very pretty,” Hally complimented just at the right moment to see Mrs. Zabini blush softly with a smile

Harry whispered in Blaise’s ear, “Malfoy is here,” He whispered to her. The twins watched the reaction spread on Blaise’s face like wild fire.

Hally giggled, “We know Blaise, but we promised our dad to behave. Harry why don’t you go ahead and lead them to the ballroom, I’ll get the next ring,” Hally offered watching her twin brother look back at her while he wore a sly grin on his face. It confused Hally at first, before she shook it off when the doorbell rung once more. She went to answer the door finding the Weasley clan next with the youngest one of all...Ginny Weasley. The two girls looked at one another, tilting their heads slightly, as if they were both trying to figure the other one out until Fred and George broke their eye contact.

“Lady Hex, you remember our little sister Ginny,” Fred and George grinned

“Oh yes, but it’s been awhile. Hello Ginny, it’s nice to see you again” Hally greeted politely

Ginny was a loss for words, she didn’t know what to say to Hally. Molly layed her hand on Ginny’s shoulder; “She’s still a bit shy Hally dear, but she’ll come around. Ginny remember, be polite and no tricks...”

“Tricks?” Hally asked with interest. Fred and George nodded at her knowingly

“Oh no! Mum, you had to say that word in front of one of the biggest pranksters at Hogwarts,” Ron groaned

Hally blinked her eyes at him. “Gee Ron, and here I was deciding to leave you alone after last year, but oh well...”

“No, no, no!” Ron cried out as though begging. “It was just a joke, honest.”

“Uh-huh. So was I Ron. I meant it, you’re officially off my list of torturing,” Hally grinned at him

Ron blinked his eyes at her, “Are you feeling all right Hally? I mean you are actually leaving me alone?” He asked

“Yeah Ron, just the first years...except Ginny of course.” Hally confessed truthfully while she led them inside the manor.

The Weasley’s looked around them in awe, “Well, I must say that Severus is taking very good care of you two,” Molly admitted in relief

“Yes. But he’s also strict with our schooling like he is with every Gryffindor” Hally grinned.

She led them into the ballroom, seeing Harry chase Blaise around “What the...,”

“Hally, make your brother stop chasing me down for a kiss,” Blaise squealed

“Just one kiss Blaise, come on” Harry cackled

Hally bursted into laughter at the sight. “Harry, leave Blaise alone” she giggled

“Ok, but I expect that kiss later Blaise, you sassy snake” Harry grinned letting Blaise alone while laughter filtered the room.

Soon their invited guests were all present, and the party began right on time.

Chapter 2

Soon all of their guests had arrived, and the party began right on time...

All the Slytherins as well as a few Gryffindor's that were invited to the twins' birthday party, gathered around Harry and Hally while the adults conversed amongst themselves. The twins' first task was opening their gifts and thanking their friends and other guests who were invited to the party in respect to their father Severus.

Screech popped into the ballroom right in front of the twins, setting their first gift down before them.

"Those are from me, you two. Open them at the count of three. One...two...three!" Severus announced giving them the word go

The twins tore open the wrappings at the same time while their friends giggled and sniggered at their antics.

"Gods, can you both be any more alike?" Blaise teased them with a big grin on her face, the others started cackling over her harmless tease.

"We're not that alike Blaise," Hally grinned at the light-brown-haired girl

"Yeah, come here and I'll show you" Harry wiggled his eyebrows up and down at Blaise

Blaise started to blush from Harry's comment. Laughter erupted from the other Slytherins.

"Stop that Harry," Blaise grinned

"What's the matter Blaise? Is my big brother trying to get you again?" Hally asked with a snigger

"Hally! Oh man," Blaise blushed once more

The twins pulled their gifts out, after seeing what they were.

“Oh cool!” Harry exclaimed

“Wickedly sweet!” Hally cried out

Ron’s eyes went wide, “Hey, they got dueling robes!” Ron blurted out in awe

Draco got closer after hearing Ron’s words, “What? No way!” Draco replied noticing the robes.

“Wow, they even have our initials on them” Harry and Hally both commented with grins

“Yeah, but one has green on it and the other has Silver, why?” Ron asked them

“Because Ron, green is my favorite color,” Harry answered

“And my favorite color is Silver” Hally spoke next

Draco turned to look at his father in shock from that bit of news. Lucius only looked back with a stone face, staying silent.

“Really Ron, they may look somewhat alike, but they are different in other ways. Everyone knows that” Hermione, who was the last guest to arrive on her own replied

“Oh,” Ron simply said, feeling a little sheepish that he should have realized that being that he had twin brother’s hisself.

Screech sat two more boxes down in front of Harry and Hally.

“Now those will go with your robes. They are also from me,” Severus announced next when everyone suddenly heard a loud explosion outside of the ballroom.

Everyone looked at the doorway of the ballroom seeing something run by like a blur. Screech quickly hobbled to the doorway peering out, and then looked back at Severus in anger.

“Master, that houseelf is back again!” Screech exclaimed then joined the rest of the houseelves to try to catch him.

Severus went to the doorway, “Find that Rogue houseelf and bring him to me!” He bellowed out while the twins looked at each other before scrambling to where their father stood peeking their heads out to see, their eyes landing upon their demolished huge birthday cake that was waiting to be rolled into the ballroom.

Hally let out a gasp, “The cake! He blew up our cake!” Hally yelled out

“Oh man. Hal calm down you made two cakes,” Harry whispered

“Yes, but that one was made extra special for you Harry,” Hally spoke in low key when Dobby skidded to a halt right in front of them.

“Grab Him!” Screech yelled out to the other Houseelves

Hally seethed in anger “You blew up our cake! Now you’re going to get it!” She shouted getting ready to join the chase

Severus grabbed her arm swiftly before she lunged for the houseelf.

“Calm down Raven, we know you are angry, but let the other houseelves do their jobs. We’ll simply serve the spare birthday cake, it is just as big as this one was,” Severus told her while he steered the twins back inside the ballroom.

The second cake was brought inside immediately; to make sure that nothing happened to it while the twins and their friends began to play some wizarding games, one being that each one drew out a piece of paper with a boy or girls name on it, when it became that person’s turn, they had to read out the name and stand in the middle of the circle with that person to kiss them after a wand had chosen them of course. The wand spun around while levitating when it land on Harry first.

“Go on Harry. Read the name on your piece of paper,” Hally giggled

Harry opened his paper then grinned from ear to ear. “Blaise,” Harry read the name aloud before standing in the middle of the circle

Blaise suddenly got shoved gently into the center facing Harry, “Go on Blaise, pucker up” Hally and the other girls squealed out with a fit full of giggles.

“There must have been a mix up! The papers wasn’t shaken up right...oh man” Blaise blushed seeing Harry crook his finger at her

“Come here Blaise, time to get that kiss” Harry replied while cackling with the other boys

Blaise let out a small groan before allowing Harry to give her a kiss and going back to where she stood, blushing.

“Now that was a hot kiss! Come here Blaise, I want another one,” Harry grinned evilly

Laughter erupted around the circle as well as from the adults.

“Harry leave her alone now, you got your kiss now spin the wand,” Hally giggled at the two

“Ok, here we go now, get ready everyone,” Harry exclaimed then spun the wand around. The tip faced them while it spun around until it stopped in front of Hally.

“Oh no,” Hally gasped hearing sniggers, giggles, and cackles.

“Come on Hal, who is the name on your paper?” Harry asked with a snigger

Hally slowly opened her paper that revealed the name. Her eyes went wide

“Well who is it Hally?” Hermione enquired

“Malfoy” Hally read aloud

There was a brief silence in the ballroom before everyone burst into laughter at Hally’s predicament. The boys pushed Draco into the center of the circle,

“Get out there Malfoy,” Harry cackled with the rest of them

“Um can I pick another name please?” Hally asked suddenly, getting a weird feeling about the situation

“No way Hal! It’s the rules, you have to kiss Malfoy” Harry cackled

Severus waved his hand at Hally “Go on Raven, play the game fairly now” Severus smirked

“Oh man, this is going to be good,” Ron sniggered watching the two look at each other as though the other had something gross on them.

The two reluctantly kissed each other, when Hally felt a strange feeling inside of her before they quickly moved away wiping their mouths with their hands.

“Gross!” they both cried out over roars of laughter

They continued the game when minutes later the wand stopped in front of Draco.

“Ok, Malfoy who’s the one on your paper?” Harry asked

Draco opened his paper, “Pansy” He read aloud, going to the center of the circle with Pansy.

“I don’t want to play anymore,” Hally blurted out suddenly, she walked away to sit down

“Hally how come?” Blaise asked

“I’m just getting bored with the game, that’s all” Hally answered

Suddenly everyone wanted to know the real reason why and started asking Hally the same question.

“I just don’t ok!” Hally exclaimed, getting irritated then looked at Draco and Pansy.

“Well go on Malfoy, kiss her” she replied, her reaction being clearly noticed by Severus

***‘Oh no’* Severus thought**

Harry had a hard time believing his twin sister, especially the dreams that she was having as of late. “Hal, there is another reason why you want to stop playing the game and your not telling. Now what is it?” Harry questioned suspiciously

“Look, you all can continue to play, but I really don’t want to play Harry.” Hally answered, wanting to drop the subject.

Hally turned her eyes back toward the two standing in the center of the circle. “Go ahead Malfoy, kiss her” Hally spoke out with a slightrness of sarcasm coming from her. Harry knew what the problem was at that moment.

“Hal a word please? Excuse us for the moment everyone” Harry replied before he left the ballroom with his twin sister.

He faced his sister once they were out of earshot.

“Now talk little sister, what’s going on?” Harry demanded his question

“Nothing,” Hally answered quickly averting her eyes

“You don’t like Malfoy do you?” Harry questioned her with narrowed eyes

“Who?” Hally asked making a weird face

“Malfoy,” Harry answered her, waiting for her reply

“No!” Hally answered way too quickly at that moment

Harry took a small step away from her. “Eww! You do like Malfoy! Hal, what is wrong with you?” Harry exclaimed his question in low key

Hally shook her head before confessing to her brother. “It’s just a small crush Harry, I’ll get over it. To be honest I don’t know why I created that scene in there.” Hally explained to him finally

“Please do or that vision of yours will happen,” Harry told her before they headed back inside

“She’s all right, just bored. Malfoy go ahead so we can end the game.” Harry announced to their guests, keeping their secret safe.

Draco gave Pansy a kiss, made a face, and grabbed a napkin to wipe his mouth.

“Bloody hell, little Potter can kiss way better than that Pansy!” Draco exclaimed, and then noticed the looks on the boys’ faces.

Flint wiggled his eyebrows at Hally, “Oh ho! Hally can kiss!” he hooted

Hally quickly hid her face from them so they wouldn’t see her blush.

“All right, let’s play another game here everyone,” Harry announced, sniggering at his sisters predicament.

They were all making suggestions on what game they all wanted to play next.

“How about chess?” Ron suggested “NO!” the rest cried out as well as the twins.

“I know one that everyone can learn...unless of course there’s a wizarding version of it” Hermione commented next

“What game?” the twins asked, clearly interested in her suggestions

“Truth or Dare?” Hermione suggested

Everyone looked at each other before looking back at her. “How do you know that game?” Flint questioned her

“Oh please! The muggle kids has always played that game at parties,” Hermione answered

“Hermione is correct. They do play it” Harry verified truthfully

Flint pondered on the suggestion, “All for Truth or Dare?” He questioned the other Slytherins, seeing all hands go up in the air quickly

“Truth or Dare it is. Since it’s Harry and Hally’s Birthday party; one of them should go first,” Flint announced

Both twins started to whisper, to see which one would go first when Harry got an idea from noticing Percy across the room sitting down in a chair.

“How about if I go first?” Harry asked aloud

“All right Harry...”

“Truth or Dare Hal?” Harry questioned waiting for her answer

“Dare” Hally answered, bracing herself for the worst

Harry gave her an evil grin, “I dare you to go over there, sit on Percy’s lap and flirt with him,” Harry dared, Hally’s eyes went wide.

“Are you serious? Wait, this is a joke right?” Hally asked

“Nope. That is your dare...unless you are a HufflePuff in disguise,” Harry told her

Several sniggers erupted in the ballroom, Hally narrowed her eyes at the culprits then looked back at her brother,

“Dare Accepted big brother,” Hally accepted then walked over to where Percy Weasley sat.

Percy stretched his arms over his shoulder yawning when Hally sat down upon his lap with ease. Percy cleared his throat.

“Hally, what are you doing?” Percy enquired

“Nothing. I just noticed that you looked very cute acting all grown up.” Hally answered

Everyone gathered around Harry, listening in on Hally’s comment, grinning.

“Thank you Hally,” Percy simply said, looking at several paintings that were hanging on the wall when Hally started to play with his hair.

“You know, I really like your hair this way. It makes you look so sweet,” Hally commented

Percy cleared his throat. “I try; ahem I’m feeling rather warm, are you?” Percy enquired

“No,” Hally answered him. Harry and the others started sniggering.

Hally looked into Percy’s eyes just then. “Percy, would you like a kiss? I promise not to tell Susie,” Hally asked in a sultry voice

Suddenly Hally felt something funny coming from Percy. She quickly got up from Percy’s lap. Percy stood up swiftly “Uh, excuse me!” Percy exclaimed walking out of the ballroom in quick strides.

“Boy! Did he ever leave fast!” Hally commented

Laughter erupted from their friends after hearing Hally's comment.

"Ok Hal, it's your turn to ask someone," Harry cackled, amazed that his twin sister can do a good dare

The game went on with laughter, giggles, and sniggers until the houseelves brought the party food inside. Soon, everyone was gathered around the long buffet table, helping themselves to many selections of foods. Ron could not help his-self, he piled his dish high while the twins watched with raised eyebrows.

"What? I like all of it" Ron told them

"Nothing Ron, eat all you want there's plenty for everyone." The twins replied leaving the subject alone.

Finally, it was time to serve the cake, both twins each took an end, slicing the confection, and handing it to their guests. Ron had two slices of cake, Draco took three slices, while Harry had four. Hally could only grin at her brother, seeing that he remained to have a healthy appetite.

"Now you're not going to tell Ron or Malfoy that you beat them both on having more cake than they are you Harry?" Hally enquired

Harry gave her a sly grin, "Who me? Never Hal" He answered her then devoured his fourth slice of cake

They noticed their father Severus speaking to the Malfoy's, he turned their way.

"Raven, you have something to give to Draco I believe?" Severus questioned the raven-red-streak-haired girl

"Do I have to now dad?" Hally asked with a slight groan

"Yes, right now young lady," Severus answered, giving Hally a stern look

Hally blew out a quiet sigh then went to retrieve a package that sat alone upon a small table in the corner of the ballroom, and headed over to where Severus and the Malfoy's stood.

Hally held the wrapped package out to Draco, "Happy belated Birthday Malfoy," She spoke politely, waiting for Draco to take the package

"Thanks" Draco muttered, taking the package from Hally

"Well, go on son. Open it," Lucius told him with a slight nod

Draco opened the package, to find a complete dragon design wizards chess set.

"Wonderful workmanship on the design, quite expensive indeed. Miss Potter, you have a good eye on these things," Lucius commented thoughtfully while Draco continued to stare at the gift in a stunned awe.

"Son, do you not have something for Miss. Potter?" Lucius reminded Draco

"Oh yeah, yeah. Here, Happy Birthday Potter," Draco mumbled, practically shoving Hally's gift into her hands

Hally opened her gift, finding a powder blue robe. "Oh. Thanks" Hally simply said politely, making a wincing face on the color.

"Mother picked the color out," Draco replied

"Um...it's really...nice. Thank you again," Hally hesitated before walking away and making a gagging face from their view.

Draco watched her cross the room, setting the gift down without a second glance.

"She hated it," he exclaimed looking up at his parents

Severus looked at him, "Oh? What was it?" He enquired

"A dress robe. Powder blue," Draco answered

Severus swore under his breath before making a reply, "Nice gift, but the color is wrong. Raven prefers black or Silver...Both together if any. Don't get the wrong idea, Raven...prefers the dark colors as well as her brother," Severus explained to them

"Oh dear. I did not know Severus, I'm sure that the maker can change the color," Narcissa replied

"There's no need for that. Raven will most likely have the houseelves do that," Severus assured them

Harry peeked at the gift from Draco. "Eww, powder blue Hal?" Harry asked

"Mrs. Malfoy picked it out Harry, don't worry about it, I'll have it fixed." Hally answered closing the box quickly while shuddering over the color.

After the party ended, both twins had seen their guests out, thanking them for showing up.

"I must admit, even with a few Gryffindor's being here, I had a good time. See you both at school," Flint informed them before leaving with his family

"See you at school Flint," the twins grinned, waving goodbye before closing the door.

They headed into the main living parlor to sit down. Severus looked up from his desk.

"You both did an excellent job on behaving yourselves today. Now remember Connor, you go to the Weasley's first and Raven will join you...hold on a moment," Severus spoke out after finding a letter unopened on his desk.

Severus read the letter, "Raven, I'm afraid that Charlie had to cancel on you, so you'll go with Connor to the Weasley's instead. I will join you two in Diagon Alley in a few weeks after you receive your letters on what you both will be needing, and you will both be heading to school with them. I'm sorry if I won't be

seeing you two off at the station, but we have a new Professor again this year and I have to make sure that he gets settled in.” Severus informed them

“Who is the new Professor dad?” the twins asked at once

“Gilderoy Lockhart,” Severus answered

Harry looked quite confused, “Isn’t he an author?” He asked

“Yeah he is, and a great big fraud. Dad and I met him once, and the big oaf tried to show dad a better way to make potions, blotched it up big time he did,” Hally answered

Severus bursted into laughter over the memory then collected himself quickly

“I’m surprised that you remember that day Raven. Just keep your eyes on that one Connor and you’ll see what your sister means...come to think of it, Raven is so far the only female that isn’t heart struck over the wizard.” Severus spoke out in detail

“Thank gods for that.” Hally simply muttered

“Sounds like he’s conceited to me,” Harry commented

“He is,” Hally replied remembering the man smiling at the females while they swooned for him.

“You two best get your things ready for the morning. Silver and Iris as well, Your cats are already at the school to help Mrs. Norris to hunt for rats in the dungeons,” Severus informed them

They headed up to their rooms to pack for their summer holiday at the Weasley’s.

Chapter 3

The twins headed upstairs to their rooms after their birthday party ended, to pack what they would need when they head to the Burrow early the next morning for their summer holiday...

The twin's private parlor were soon erupting noises of thumping, dragging, and both twins carrying loud conversations with each other, reading off their checklist.

Harry looked around the parlor, "We need our private Quidditch equipment..."

"THUMP!" "Got it Harry," Hally intervened after struggling with the huge Quidditch trunk, then looked at her checklist.

"Let's see, we need our Hexer's notebook, our stash of our own made Potions..."

"Got them both Hal," Harry intervened, putting their notebook, and potions into a satchel

"We need our brooms..."

"Got them as well little sis," Harry grinned

Hally looked around their parlor, "Looks like we have everything then, except for our dragons, but Hagrid has them at the school," she sighed, already missing her luck dragon

"I know Hal, but we did promise Hagrid that he'd be like their godfather or some sort of guardian to Silver and Iris," Harry reminded his twin sister

"I know that Harry, just miss Silver a little bit," Hally grinned while she finished her part of the packing

They finished their packing in no time by putting their things into a pile to the side of the doorway, waiting to be sent ahead of them to the Weasley's home. They headed downstairs to the main living parlor, sitting down on their favorite sofa.

Severus glanced up from his important parchments at the two.

"I take that you both are finished with you packing?" He questioned them both

"Yes sir" both twins answered with a grin

"Good," Severus simply said, noticing the excitement over the twins' faces

"I can't wait to give Ginny the big information about Hogwarts," Hally ranted

"Neither can I," Harry agreed with her

Severus pointed his finger at them both, "Provided that you inform her not to be late for my classes. You know that I will not tolerate lateness," Severus reminded Harry and Hally both

"We know dad," Hally assured him before stretching her arms over her head

Harry sniggered, "Provided that Ron doesn't go into a daze from your appearance Hal," He grinned

Hally lowered her arms. "Why is that?" Hally enquired not liking where the conversation was going

Harry pointed at the upper part of her body, "You rather...changed before school let out for our summer holiday," Harry commented

Hally slapped Harry's arm lightly. "I can't help it if the girl part of me had decided to show up Harry James," Hally blushed, crossing her arms

They both heard Severus chuckle, "I wouldn't worry about it Raven. It is quite normal for a female start changing as she grows up," Severus smirked

Hally shook her head, “I’m surrounded by males,” she uttered with a sigh

“And you’ll be even more surrounded at the Burrow,” Harry teased his twin sister with an evil grin on his face

“Rotten brother,” Hally grumbled playfully hiding her grin from their view

Harry gave her a thoughtful look. “I have to ask you this Hal, when you suggested that we wear our robes, was it to hide your new appearance?” he asked with interest

Blush crept up to Hally’s cheeks, “Guilty Harry, but I won’t be able to hide it forever, so best to get it done and over with,” She grinned

“Yeah, so I can keep the other guys at a distance,” Harry grinned evilly at her

“Except Cedric Harry...”

“Speaking about Cedric, I heard from Ron that he doesn’t live too far from them, so he’ll probably be over to see you there a lot,” Harry announced

They noticed the expression on Hally’s face until Severus and Harry both plugged their ears,

“Wahoo! I can’t wait!” Hally exclaimed full of excitement hearing Harry and Severus chuckle at her outburst.

NEXT MORNING (THE BURROW)

Severus waited for the twins inside the main living room parlor until he heard their footsteps, turning to see them running inside, eager to leave immediately.

“Alright you two contain yourselves. We will arrive just in time for you two to join them for breakfast.” Severus announced

“Cool!” Harry cried out

“Wicked!” Hally exclaimed

Severus shook his head at the twins. “All right then, we’ll take the Floo Network...”

“Floo Network?” Harry enquired wearily

“Yeah Harry, through the fireplace...you never did that have you?” Hally asked with wide eyes. Harry shook his head at her answer.

Hally turned back to Severus, “Um dad...”

“We’ll port key instead,” Severus announced after doing some quick thinking, and grabbing an object from his desk

Both twins took hold of the port key at the same time, feeling as though something was pulling the inside of their navels. Suddenly they felt their feet hit ground, looking around their surroundings and seeing nothing but open field below. They were standing on top of a hill.

“This way Connor, Raven.” Severus called to them, already heading down the hill

They quickly scrambled down the hill to catch up with their adopted father. They winded up onto a deserted dirt road, looking at everything while they continued on to their destination until they noticed an odd-looking building smack in the middle of a fenced in field. The twins noticed someone peering outside the door just as they entered through the gate.

Ron beamed happily at the twins coming their way, he turned to look over his shoulder.

“Mum! They’re here!” Ron yelled excitedly “BOOM!”

The twins took one look at Ron after they got closer, and started bursting into hysterical laughter over his appearance.

“MUM! FRED AND GEORGE ARE DOING IT AGAIN!” Ron yelled out in anger

Hally could not help but lean on her brother, “His hair looks like a blue flame!” Hally commented in between laughs

“I know,” Harry laughed as well

“Oh lord this is going to be one heck of a visit,” Severus muttered while the three headed up to the odd-looking house.

They suddenly heard Molly Weasley lecture her twins. “No more pranks you two or I will deal with personally!” Molly boomed at Fred and George Weasley then noticed Severus, Harry and Hally standing at the door.

“Hello Severus. Harry, Hally come in you sweet dears, you made it just in time for breakfast.” Molly greeted them with a warm smile

“Sweet would not be what I would describe Connor and Raven Molly. They are as bad as your twins when it comes to pranks.” Severus replied with a smirk, stepping inside the house with the twins

Fred and George did not hesitate one second on greeting Harry and Hally both.

“Lord and Lady Hex, how are you?” they asked

“Great! Nice prank,” Harry and Hally answered sniggering

“You see,” Severus simply said wearing a well-known smirk when Arthur Weasley came in

“Morning Weasley’s” Arthur greeted taking a seat

“Morning dad,” The Weasley clan announced in chorus

“Morning indeed. Your sons flew to Surrey and back in the family car this morning, tormenting the Potter’s own Uncle and Cousin at their new home” Molly announced

The twins clearly got interested in that subject.

“Tormented our relatives?” Hally asked

“How far did you get on the tormenting?” Harry enquired

“That is enough you two,” Severus told them

Arthur looked at his sons, “Really? How did it go...,”

“ARTHUR!” Molly boomed in shock. Arthur winced,

“That was very wrong boys, very wrong indeed,” Arthur stated finally

Fred and George nudged the twins, “Oh your muggle cousin got a complex over it,” Fred whispered to them

“Wicked!” Hally giggled

“Raven!” Severus yelled “Oops” Hally sniggered

“Wished I was there,” Harry commented

“Connor!” Severus boomed

“S-Sorry,” Harry sniggered next

“You see what I mean? As bad as your own twins,” Severus stated with a wave of his hand toward the twins, watching them continue to laugh

The potion Master sighed in irritation, “I’ll see you two in a few weeks in Diagon Alley, until then behave yourselves,” Severus told them before leaving the burrow.

Chapter 5

The Potion Master sighed in irritation, "I'll see you two in a few weeks in Diagon Alley, until behave yourselves," Severus told them before leaving the Burrow...

Both twins kept their eyes on the door, and then turned their attention back to the Weasleys.

"Well he certainly did not stay long," Molly spoke out breaking the silence

"He's in a hurry Mrs. Weasley, but he did promise to stay longer the next time," the twins explained simultaneously

"Well in that case, it's quite all right then. Ginny has been waiting for you to show up Hally, having another girl here has made Ginny very excited. It gets to be a bit lonely sometimes being the only girl in this lot," Molly informed Hally with a warm smile

"Wicked," Hally grinned while Fred and George grabbed hers and Harry's things, taking them upstairs.

"Ginny! Harry and Hally is here!" Molly called up from the bottom of the stairs

They suddenly heard footsteps running from above them. The youngest Weasley member finally made it downstairs.

"Mum, have you seen my jumper...Hally!" Ginny grinned

"Hi Ginny...um it's on the cat I think? Do you have a cat?" Hally asked, looking up at Molly with a confused look on her face

"We do Hally, and that is exactly where it is," Molly answered Hally in assurance.

Ron's mouth dropped open for at least a second, "Now how did she...oh man, can't get used to her visions," Ron shook his head, the others laughed over his reaction

They noticed that both twins started to feel uneasy wearing their robes as it started to get warmer.

“All right, hand over the robes you two,” Ron spoke up holding his hand out for the twins’ robes.

Hally started to jerk slightly back while giving her older brother a glance, “Um...Ron...”

“Come on Hally, It’s not like I’m going to bite,” Ron replied

Harry tried to intervene just then, “It isn’t that Ron, it’s just that Hal here...”

Ron, who wasn’t listening to the twins, went and shrugged their robes off, not noticing his older twin brothers’ eyes go wide at Hally’s appearance.

“See? Now was that so hard?” Ron asked them, and then noticed Hally blush while she kept her eyes from them.

“Now why is she blushing Harry...”Ron’s voice trailed off at the sight of Hally

“Oh Sweet Merlin!” Ron could only cry out

Harry stepped in front of Hally quickly, “Turn your eyes away Ron!” Harry warned before looking over at Fred and George. “And you two aren’t helping either!” He added

Both Fred and George shook their heads. “Sorry Lord Hex, it’s just that...we’re not used to seeing Lady Hex looking like...” Fred spoke first

“A girl...oh man and is she ever,” George commented next

Hally snapped their way, “Thanks a lot you two!” she exclaimed continuing to blush

Molly quickly stepped in to calm Hally down, “Now Hally, my boys know better than to make someone feel bad, don’t you

boys?" Molly questioned Fred, George, and Ron while giving them a look of warning

"Oh yeah! Sure! We would never make you feel out of place," Fred, George, and Ron rambled out, keeping their eyes from Hally's view.

Arthur scratched his head at the commotion, "Not to make her feel embarrassed, but it is a male's trait to notice when a female starts to change, comparing her appearance from then and now...it's really not that bad," Arthur chimed in

"Arthur!" Molly yelled out until noticing Hally grin

"Thank you Mr. Weasley," Hally replied before giving the head Weasley a big hug

"You're welcome Hally," Arthur told her, seeing his wife smile at him with a nod

Molly decided to end the matter, "Well now that that is settled, Ginny why don't you show Hally where she'll be sleeping while Ron will show Harry where he'll be sleeping," Molly suggested

Both twins looked at each other, "Sleeping?" They both asked at once

"Yes dears. Harry, you'll be rooming with Ron while Hally will be rooming with Ginny," Molly explained to them. She then noticed the look on Hally's face, "Oh dear," she simply said

Ron spoke out in assurance, "Hally, it's all right. My room is across from Ginny's," Ron announced. Both twins grinned at that moment while following Ron and Ginny upstairs.

"My goodness, she perked up fast," Molly stated with a low laugh.

In the meantime Hally handed Ginny a box after they entered the bedroom. Ginny opened the box finding homemade chocolates.

“You made these?” Ginny enquired

“Yes, with Harry’s help of course...don’t let him know that I told you that,” Hally grinned. She watched Ginny try a piece of candy

“Mmm, they’re very good Hally,” Ginny complimented

Harry stood in the doorway, “Hal...,” “Here Harry, I’ve got yours here too. Can you take these to Fred and George?” Hally asked with a grin

“Sure, but what about Ron?” Harry questioned

“Here. I suppose he can have some too,” Hally teased handing over four boxes to her brother

“Cool...don’t you have any Hal?” Harry enquired

“Yes Harry I do...oh and one for Percy...where is he by the way?” Hally asked her question to Ginny

“Inside his room at the top of the third set of stairs,” Ginny answered

Hally started to head in that direction when the Weasley twins, Ron, and Ginny started to protest

“He doesn’t like us at his door Lady Hex, it’s off limits,” Fred and George warned her

“Percy specifically told us not to disturb him Hally,” Ron reasoned

“Percy is going to be angry,” Ginny commented

Hally stopped to look at them, “I’m only giving him some chocolate guys, it’s no big deal,” She grinned and started to climb the third set of stairs. She stood at the top listening to Percy rant about inside his room while Fred, George, Ron, Ginny, and Harry watched at the bottom, waiting for Percy to explode in anger.

Hally politely knocked on Percy's door. There was a loud clanking noise before Percy swung his door open.

"I thought I said..." Percy looked down to find that it was Hally at his door

"Well hello to you too Percy," Hally greeted him, grinning from ear to ear as she noticed him take one look at her and blushed.

"Uh Percy, your still not thinking about what happened at mine and Harry's Birthday party are you? Because it was only a game of Truth or Dare I was playing," Hally explained with a wide grin.

Percy sighed in relief finally, "Oh thank Merlin, for a moment I thought..."

"You thought what?" Hally asked, still grinning over Percy's predicament

"That you had a huge crush on me," Percy answered while shifting his feet

"Percy! I'm speechless really..."

"All right Hally, don't push it," Percy grinned at the raven-red-streak-haired girl

Hally peered inside his room from his left side, "Can I come in?" She asked politely

"Uh..." "I brought you something," Hally grinned showing him the box that she held in her hands.

Percy pondered at first, then stepped aside while his three brothers, sister, and Harry watched with wide eyes.

"Sure, just don't mind the room, it's small," Percy explained allowing Hally to walk in before he closed the door behind them.

Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny turned to look at Harry before they all started to snigger, "There's a girl in p-perfect Percy's room,

oh whoa!" they all laughed quietly leaving the stairs for the moment.

Hally handed Percy the box that she held, "Here you go Percy. I made plenty for your brothers and sister as well," Hally grinned, handing Percy the box she held, and then looked around his room.

"Thanks Hally...I take it that you're impressed?" Percy asked after noticing Hally scan his room

"It's a great room Percy, you shouldn't be embarrassed by it," Hally answered

"I'm not, but it could be better if it was a little bigger," Percy commented

"Having it bigger doesn't make the room Percy; it's what you do with the room that makes it great..."

"Kiss her big boy!" They heard at the other side of Percy's door. It was Fred and George playing around as usual. They both started to blush

"Yeah, give her some sugar Percy ol' boy!" Harry called outside the door next.

Percy started to get angry, "Why those no good pranksters..."

"Percy, want to get even with them?" Hally asked suddenly, getting angry herself over her big brother's and her two best friends comments.

"What do you have in mind?" Percy asked her while the others were laughing outside of his door.

Hally kept her link off from her brother, whispering her plat against them.

Percy jerked his head back after she was done, "That is so cruel...I'm in," Percy grinned getting ready.

Fred, George, and Harry were still laughing when suddenly they heard loud noises coming from the room.

“What’s going on...?”

“Oh Percy! I knew it was you all along you sexy Prefect boy!” Hally’s voice cried out from inside of Percy’s room

They’re eyes went wide while they listened quietly, “Let me rock your world Lady Hex! Come here and sit on my lap while I show you how a real man treats a beautiful woman,” Percy spoke out loudly

Ron, who was beside Harry, looked at him with his mouth open. “Harry, what is going on in there?” He asked

“I don’t know, her link is off,” Harry whispered while shaking his head

“Oh yes Percy! No body has to know about us now! It will be our secret!” Hally yelled out once more while signaling hand gestures to Percy on what to do next.

They then heard more noises coming from the room. Harry started to get raging mad and began to pound on Percy’s door.

“Hey! Get off of my sister Percy Weasley!” Harry bellowed out in anger

Molly ran up the stairs to see what the loud commotion was all about.

“What on earth...?”

Everyone pointed at Percy’s door while they continued to hear loud noises. Molly took out her wand swiftly,

“Hal is in there!” Harry informed Molly

“Oh yes Percy!” Molly heard Hally yell out

Molly's eyes went wide, "Percy! Hally! Alohamora!" Molly shouted unlocking Percy's door and flinging it open.

There was Percy on one side of his room sitting down grinning from ear to ear while Hally stood on the other side cackling in hysterical laughter while pointing at her brother, Fred and George.

Percy lifted his chin up at the three, "We gotcha!" He grinned

Hally wiped her eyes, "Did you enjoy your pay back boys?" She asked in between laughs

"Hally Lillian!" Harry shouted "Well you asked for it big brother," Hally giggled at him

Fred and George looked over at Percy in stunned silence before making a reply, "Percy actually played a prank...awesome!" They both grinned

Molly raised her hands up in the air, "Honestly Hally dear, Your father is right, you're just like Fred and George," She commented before leaving with a smile on her face.

The twins looked at one another, "That was so low Hal," Harry grinned at last

"But you three started it," Hally reminded him with a grin

Harry feigned a deep thought, "We did do that didn't we? Well I'd say we tied on the prank Hal," Harry replied before they left Percy's room.

Hally waved at Percy, "See you later Percy," Hally grinned seeing Percy wave back before closing his door after his brother's followed them out.

They stepped off the last step heading to The twin's room, "Since you two are here," Fred spoke out

“We wanted to challenge you two to a small prank war, you two against us,” George replied next

Harry and Hally pondered on their suggestion before answering.

“You’re both on” they agreed grinning evilly and shaking their hands in agreement

Chapter 6

"We're in," the twins agreed grinning evilly and shaking Fred and George's hands in agreement...

The two youngest members of the Weasley family watched the four wearily.

Ginny tapped Hally on her shoulder, "Um Hally, I have to tell you that Fred and George will change something on you with their..."

"Homemade Toffees? Still doing the same old prank boys? I thought you two knew better than that, but oh well," Hally teased her two best buddies with an evil gleam in her eyes.

Harry sniggered over Fred and George's reaction. "I think that you just struck gold Hal," Harry commented in between sniggers.

Fred and George both feigned a wounded expression. "We're insulted Lady Hex," Fred remarked

"That you would think so little of us like that," George replied

Hally gave her older brother a sly glance before speaking once more, "So who was going to set the bait boys?" Hally enquired deviously

"George was while I was going to...", Fred's voice trailed off after getting elbowed by his twin and seeing Hally staring at them triumphantly

"Why you devious little snake!" Fred and George exclaimed

"Thank you for that compliment," Hally cackled out, laughing along with her brother Harry.

Ginny looked from one set of twins to the other. "You mean that Hally knows how you two work?" She asked her twin brothers, watching them shift their feet slightly at the same time.

“Like reading a good book on a rainy day,” Hally replied before going into a fit of giggles.

They then heard growls coming from Fred and George. They noticed them giving Hally a menacing look.

“Oh Hal, I believe that you hurt their pride now,” Harry sniggered

Hally blinked her eyes innocently, “Me hurt their pride? But I was only stating a fact big brother. I mean look at my point of view here. I’ve hung around these two since their first year and I haven’t seen anything new yet...”

“That is it! Take heed Lady Hex!” Fred and George boomed out, taking slow steps closer to the twins.

Both twins started to back away slowly, each wearing evil grins. “I think it is time for us to go now? Uh yeah,” Harry cackled, and then took off into a run

“Eep! I think your right Harry,” Hally squeaked lightly, following behind him

Ginny watched the two run off grinning, until she turned around noticing her twin brother grin evilly at her.

“Oh look George, they left our little sister behind for us to have some fun with,” Fred cackled

“Yeah I see that. Come here little sister, you now know our secret and now we must shut you up for good,” George cackled as well

“Gulp!” Ginny took off after the twins swiftly, “Hey you two! Wait for me!” She yelled out while Ron stepped out into the hall watching her go past him

“Ginny, what’s with you...?”

“Well hey! If it isn’t little Ronnikins. Come here for a minute little brother,” Fred and George sniggered evilly

Ron looked at Ginny's retreating back, took one glance at their twin brothers, and as quick as his feet could take him, took off into a run, following their little sister to wherever she was going. Ron finally found out where they were heading and whom they was following, the Potter twins and outside their house beside the old tree stump in their yard.

"Now how did I know that you two were involved?" Ron questioned Harry and Hally both

"Hal, took a shot at Fred and George's pride over their pranks Ron," Harry grinned

Ron looked slightly confused, "Is that even possible? What I mean to say is I've never known anyone that could take a shot on Fred and George's pride," Ron commented thoughtfully

A smile spreaded on Hally's face, "Now you know that it can be done Ron," Hally simply said

"Yes and now you must go as well Ronnikins," They heard, looking to see Fred and George coming up on them.

Hally opened her hands with a smile on her face, "Oh come on you two. It was only a harmless joke," she told them

The Weasley twins stared at her before shrugging their shoulders, "We know that Lady Hex, you're the only one that is allowed to do that besides Lord Hex here, but that is all," They replied before grinning at her

Harry grinned at that bit of news. "Cool, so when shall we begin our small prank war you two?" he enquired, wanting to behind their little war already

Fred as well as George gave Harry a grin, "You're an eager on Harry, we like that, but we was thinking along the lines of starting our small war tomorrow, just to let you and Hally get settled in for now," they both explained

'Sure, we'll get you two while you sleep,' Hally thought, letting Harry hear her

'I'm with you little sis,' Harry thought back to her, masking his grin from being seen

"Sounds good to us guys," Harry simply said

"I agree, but remember whoever wins must bow down to the others say, "We are not worthy"," Hally announced

"No problem," Fred and George grinned at the twins, already scheming many prank possibilities inside their minds.

"Can we referee this little war between you four?" Ginny asked them suddenly

"Sure Ginny. You can referee our prank war," both set of twins answered her

Ron's mouth started to flutter like a fish when it's out of water. "Hey!" He cried out

"So is Ron, and both are off limits during our war, if anyone pranks them, the others can make them eat a doxie egg," Harry and Hally spoke out at once

"Deal!" Fred and George agreed when an owl landed on the old stump

Ron politely took the letter from its beak, reading the name quietly before sniggering, "It's for Hally from Cedric," he sung out in a tease.

They watched as the blush slowly crept up to Hally's cheeks. Hally went to grab her letter, when Harry snatched it instead.

"Harry James! You give me my letter!" Hally exclaimed, watching her own brother hold her letter out to keep her from grabbing it while the other boys sung out a teasing song of "Hally's got a beau!" to her

“Let’s see what Cedric boy wrote to my little sister,” Harry teased, sniggering with the other boys while Ginny looked at Hally in sympathy.

“You open that letter Harry, and You’ll be sorry!” Hally warned

Harry turned around with his back in front of his twin, pretending to open her letter by making a fake tearing noise,

“Harry James...!”

Harry turned back around holding her letter out, “Just kidding little sis,” Harry grinned and leaned back just as Hally playfully slapped him on the arm.

Hally opened the letter up, reading it quietly while Harry, Fred, George, and Ron made their voices sound like a females,

“Oh Hally, let me count the ways!” The four boys rambled out. Hally chose to ignore their teasing. Harry noticed Hally’s eyes dance with excitement.

“Oh no...,” “He’s going to come over this afternoon!” Hally squealed in excitement

Fred and George leaned down to Harry’s ear, “Sorry mate, but you just lost your sister on noticing other guys,” they whispered

Harry gave them a quick glance, “No, its ok guys. The only one that will be allowed close to my sister is Diggory...besides a majority of our friends of course,” Harry stated while they watched Hally ramble on

Ron shook his head in disbelief, “Boy! McGonagall, Sprout, Sinistra, and Hooch really did a number on her,” Ron blurted out being heard by Harry, Fred and George.

“We know Ron, but at least she doesn’t go over board like some girls at school we know,” Harry commented remembering Pansy Parkinson trying her best to get the guys to notice her.

“Point taken Harry,” Ron simply said while they watched Fred and George tease Hally some more.

“Your eyes are like mud, they splatter me throughout the day,” Fred and George teased Hally before cackling in laughter

Hally slapped them both playfully while wearing a grin on her face, “I’ll splatter you both all right,” Hally replied before giggling over their harmless jokes, before Molly Weasley called to them to come to breakfast at last.

The twins watched the Weasley family at the breakfast table moving about like clockwork. Ron gave Harry a nudge politely, passing him a platter of bacon and sausage bangers.

Harry leaned Ron’s way, “Is it always like this?” He asked Ron

“Every day Harry, except we don’t always have guests here,” Ron whispered

“I think its really cool seeing your family function like this Ron,” Hally intervened in his and Harry’s conversation

“You wouldn’t say that if you were in this family...,”

“Yes I would Ron, just because your family is big doesn’t mean that it is a horrible one, just the opposite,” Hally informed the red-haired boy truthfully while her brother Harry passed her the platter next after selecting what he wanted.

Both twins began to eat their breakfast as though they had fitted into the Weasley family for years, Harry speaking to Ron about Quidditch and Hally telling Ginny what to expect at Hogwarts when she gets there. Arthur looked over to Harry just then,

“Harry, I was wondering if you could tell me what the purpose of a rubber duck is to muggles?” Arthur enquired with a keen interest on Muggle items.

Harry was not certain on how to answer that question, Hally on the other hand managed to stifle a giggle before looking at her brother who sat on her left side.

“Isn’t that some sort of a joke prop for muggles Harry?” Hally asked

“Uh, yeah it is. A very stupid one, they use them for corny jokes. Not like the ones here,” Harry answered finally

Arthur looked from one twin to the other, “Ah! A useless item then.” Arthur simply said beginning to drop the subject while Harry and Hally noticed a look of failure on his face.

“But there are other muggle items that are very useful,” Harry blurted out suddenly

Hally looked at him once more, “Really Harry? What kind?” She asked with interest

“Hal, haven’t you...sorry I keep forgetting that you wasn’t raised in the muggle world,” Harry grinned while his sister, Fred, George, Ginny and Ron sniggered.

The table soon became quiet while Harry started to tell them the many muggle items that are used. Everyone listened to Harry’s every word before they started asking questions one by one.

“Wait a minute Harry, a whoopee cushion that only makes a sound of someone passing gas? That is it?” Fred and George asked simultaneously

“Yep,” Harry answered them “Mind boggling,” they muttered shaking their heads

“A thing called a Telephone? You talk to people through it instead of fire-calling them?” Hally enquired making a weird face

“Yeah. On end you can hear through and the other end you can talk through, You hold it in your hand like this,” Harry explained, doing an imaginary display with his hand.

“Wicked,” Hally grinned

“But they don’t have them here so...”

Arthur chimed in just then, “You mean that thingy on the wall over there is a Telephone? I thought it was just a wall decoration,” Arthur commented while rubbing the back of his neck in confusion.

The twins followed his gaze toward the wall near Molly’s rocking chair, which sat a few feet from the family’s fireplace. Harry quickly scrambled to where the phone was with his twin sister following behind him. Harry lifted the receiver up and placed it close to his ear.

“There’s a tone, it works!” Harry cried out, and placed the receiver to Hally’s ear

Hally crinkled her face slightly, “It sounds weird,” she replied handing the receiver back to Harry.

“It’s supposed to sound like that Hal,” Harry laughed before pushing several buttons next.

“What are you doing?” Hally asked him

“Calling Aunt Petunia,” Harry answered

“Oh. For a moment...You’re what?” Hally questioned with wide eyes

“I’m calling Aunt Petunia Hal. Remember she got divorced from Uncle Vernon last year,” Harry reminded his twin sister.

“Oh, sorry I forgotten about that,” Hally replied blushing slightly

One by one the Weasley’s gathered around the twins, eager to learn how their own phone worked. They stood around watching Harry press several numbers, and then waited while they heard a faint burring sound from the receiver.

"It's ringing," Harry whispered to Hally before everyone heard a click

"Hello?" They heard come through the receiver

Harry started to speak, "Hello Aunt Petunia? It's Harry," Harry spoke out with a grin.

They heard Petunia Dursley ramble on the phone to Harry before he spoke once more.

"Yes Hal is here with me," Harry answered looking at his twin with a grin on his face. He placed the receiver to Hally's ear again, "Say hello Hal," Harry grinned

"Hello," Hally spoke quietly, feeling uncomfortable with the phone until she grinned over Petunia's rambling. "I'm fine, how are you?" Hally asked while Harry let her take hold of the receiver and put his arm around her shoulder leaning in and listening to their aunt ramble to her grinning from ear to ear.

"Your ex-uncle called me up early this morning, telling me that some flying car with a bunch of red-haired boys hovered over his and Dudley's new home, tormenting them. Do you know anything about it dear?" they heard Petunia ask Hally

"Not until we got here Aunt Petunia," Hally giggled out while Harry cackled, pointing at Fred, George, and Ron.

"Boys," Molly simply said sternly with her hands on her hips.

"Well if you see them, tell them next time to make sure Vernon lands in a sticker patch dear. It truly made my morning hearing Vernon's day go sour. I have to go now Hally dear, I have a date this afternoon. All my love to you and Harry. Goodbye dear," Petunia spoke before hanging up the phone.

"Bye Aunt Petunia," the twins spoke out before Harry placed the receiver back on its base.

They turned around, noticing the Weasley's staring quietly.

“Aunt Petunia says next time make sure Uncle Vernon lands in the sticky patch,” Hally announced before cackling into laughter with Harry.

Molly stood still, stunned beyond belief before making a reply, “They most certainly will not! Honestly...sticky patch you say dear?” Molly enquired

“Yep. Uncle Vernon gave her a call early this morning telling her about it. It made her day,” Harry answered

Ron looked at Harry in shock, “You actually heard that being that close to her?” Ron asked

“Yeah Ron, it’s not that difficult. You just have to stay quiet and listen,” Harry answered with a grin on his face.

Arthur lifted the receiver, placing it upon his ear before placing it back on its base.

“Magnificent contraption,” Arthur commented in awe before they headed back to the table to finish their breakfast.

After breakfast, the young Weasley’s headed outside with the twins finding Cedric Diggory walking through their gate and heading up to them. He took one look at Hally’s appearance, his eyes widened slightly before grinning at her.

“Hello Hally, I see that you’ve changed a bit,” Cedric greeted

“Um...,” “Its fine Hally. It’s normal, I brought you something by the way...for you and Harry of course,” Cedric commented, not wanting to make Hally feel uncomfortable.

Cedric handed Harry and Hally each a wrapped gift. The twins opened them up simultaneously. Harry received a book on the Greatest Quidditch players in Wizard History, and Hally received a necklace of a dragon design, a diamond was set as its eye.

“Cool! Cedric thanks man, but our birthday is later on in the summer,” Harry informed the brown-haired boy

"I know, but I won't be able to come to your second birthday party that will be here. I have to go on a trip with my parents," Cedric explained while Hally's fingers caressed the necklace gently.

"Harry told me that you were into dragons. I found that in Diagon Alley before our summer holiday and well...I thought that you would like it Hally," Cedric grinned at her

Hally looked up at him with a grin, "I do like it Cedric, thank you," Hally replied, taking the necklace out of its case to put around her neck.

"Here I'll help you Hal...",

"Allow me Harry please?" Cedric asked politely

Harry raised his hands up with a wide grin on his face, "Sure, she's your girlfriend," Harry grinned, allowing Cedric to help his sister fasten the necklace around her neck.

The diamond within the eye glittered in the sunlight upon Hally's neck. Ginny smiled appreciatively at Hally's gift, admiring the piece in awe before looking over at her three brothers and seeing them make goofy faces at the scene.

"You three leave Hally alone or I'll tell mum that you're teasing her," Ginny warned them. They put their hands up innocently. Hally turned their way grinning.

"It's all right Ginny. They only funning me, I pretty much expect it," Hally replied

Harry sniggered, "Especially when it's only faces that they're making," Harry chimed in

Cedric chuckled at the commotion before getting Hally's attention, "Hally would you like to take a walk with me?" Cedric enquired holding out his hand

Hally grinned once more, blushing softly before taking Cedric's hand, and walking beside him up the path, through the gate, and down the dirt road. Ron went to stand beside Harry,

"There goes your sister Harry, like a love struck nymph," Ron commented

"Yeah, but at least she's happy Ron. I actually like Cedric. He treats Hal with respect you know," Harry grinned before turning around and joining Ron, Fred, George, and Ginny on their own adventure.

Hally's hand swung with Cedric's as they went down the dirt road until they stopped in front of another fenced yard. Cedric pointed over to a house in the distance.

"This is where I live Hally, would you like to meet my parents?" Cedric enquired

"Yes please," Hally answered while Cedric opened the gate for them leading Hally up the path to his home.

Harry turned to where the direction that his sister and Cedric went. He glanced at Ron suddenly, "Hey Ron, how far is Cedric's home by the way?" He asked

"Not far from here Harry, why do you ask?" Ron enquired

"Is there a short-cut to his house?" Harry questioned

Fred, George, and Ron sniggered at his question, "Sure there is. You see those woods over there?" Ron asked the raven-haired boy

"yeah," Harry answered him "Well there's a path in there leading straight up to Cedric's house. Come on We'll show you which path leads to it, there is more than one," Ron grinned

The four boys trotted into the woods while Ginny watched them go, "Don't you dare ruin Hally's visit," She warned the four boys

Harry glanced back at her, "We're not Ginny. Come on you can come along if you like," Harry grinned

Ginny looked at their house, and then the woods. "Wait for me!" She called out taking off, following her brother's and Harry into the woods.

They headed down the path leading to the Diggory's property, sneaking quietly up to the house, finding Hally sitting beside Cedric on a patio sofa with Cedric's arm around her shoulder while they spoke with his parents.

The five kept themselves at a safe distance, and listened to their conversation.

Mr. and Mrs. Diggory looked at Hally in appreciation.

"So this is one of the twins who lived. Hally it is an honor to finally meet you," Mr. Diggory greeted

Mrs. Diggory gave Hally a warm smile, "A charming young lady as well. We thought Cedric was playing around about seeing you until today, And Professor Snape is your adopted father?" she enquired

"Yes Mrs. Diggory. He adopt me and my brother," Hally answered politely

"A most intelligent wizard. Knows his potions quite well, a shame that he fell into that death-eater crowd years ago though," Mr. Diggory spoke out

Cedric squirmed in his seat, "Dad...,"

"Oh I don't mean to upset the dear girl Cedric, but...,"

"It's all right sir. My dad told us about it last year," Hally intervened

"He did an excellent job however, redeeming himself with the wizarding world," Mr. Diggory added

"What did he do?" Hally asked clearly interested

"Became a spy for our side Miss. Potter. A good one I might add," Mr. Diggory answered

"Some wizarding families, did not like the outcome at first until they found out that your father helped out a great deal, had gotten their respect after that," Mrs. Diggory chimed into the conversation.

"So where is your brother Miss. Potter?" Mr. Diggory enquired suddenly changing the subject.

"Oh, he's around," Hally answered, turning her head slightly in Harry's, Fred, George, Ron and Ginny's direction.

Ron was about to make a break for it just then, "She's busting us out! Oh I hate that link you two have Harry," He mumbled

Harry stopped him swiftly, "No she's not Ron, now be quiet," Harry told him

"He's at the Weasley's house dad," Cedric spoke out, not noticing that Hally took a glance where her brother and the four younger Weasley's were hiding.

"Ah. Well I certainly would like to meet your brother some day as well young lady. I heard that you two were very bright students in your house, now Cedric here...,"

"Dad you promised not to bring that up," Cedric intervened

"Hush son, You are a bright student in your house, but deciding to remain a fourth year student again? I still would very much like to know why the professors suggested that idea," Mr. Diggory exclaimed

Hally looked at Cedric in surprise, "I didn't know that. Cedric what was the reason?" She asked the brown-haired boy quietly.

"There's a career choice that I'm interested in, and I need extra scores in order for the Ministry to accept my application for review. There I confessed what you wanted to know dad," Cedric replied before looking down at his feet.

Hally remained silent, while Cedric's parents took everything in. Mr. Diggory beamed in pride suddenly. "Well now that is different. No need to be upset son, I'm proud to see my own boy think of his future ahead of time," Mr. Diggory announced

Cedric looked over at his father in relief, "Thanks dad," He grinned

His parents stood up to head inside their house, "We'll just let you two have your privacy Cedric dear," Mrs. Diggory announced

"I was hoping to show Miss. Potter the rest of the house...yes dear," Mr. Diggory sighed in defeat after getting a look of warning from his wife.

The two watched the adults go inside, "I like your parents Cedric. They're very nice," Hally commented at last.

"Yeah, but sometimes my mother has to remind dad not to interfere too much in what I do," Cedric sniggered

Hally giggled over Cedric's comment, "I almost feel sorry for him...almost," Hally grinned at him while Cedric put his arms around her.

Ron's mouth dropped open just then, "Hey Harry, he's getting way too close there," He whispered

"I can see that Ron. He's not doing anything wrong, not shut up," Harry whispered back to the red-haired boy while keeping his eyes on Cedric.

Cedric leaned his face down to Hally's, "I really missed you Hally," He told her quietly

"I missed you too," Hally replied in a quiet, letting Cedric give her a kiss.

Ginny gave a quiet sigh of awe, Fred as well as George urged Cedric on for more, Ron and Harry both made a face while uttering "Eww!" in low key.

"What does she see in him anyway? He's not even in our house, and..."

"Oh gross! Now they're playing tonsil hockey! Gods Hal, can you at least come up for air," Harry commented quietly until two hands clapped both of his shoulders. Harry turned around facing Fred and George.

"Details man. What is tonsil hockey?" They asked at one time quietly

"It's where...they're french kissing," Harry answered with a shrug

Both twins looked over to where Hally and Cedric were. "Oh man, she is changing Harry," they whispered grinning from ear to ear.

They watched the two break apart slowly, seeing Cedric glance down at his pocket watch. "I better walk you back, I have to start packing soon. We leave out early in the morning, but I promise to bring something back for you," Cedric commented taking Hally's hand

"You don't have to bring me anything back Cedric," Hally exclaimed in surprise

"I want to, besides your my girl," Cedric grinned at her, walking her back to the Weasley's.

Harry turned around quickly, "They're heading back, come on," Harry rambled out, taking off with the other's back into the woods.

They ran back through the path, reaching their home just in time seeing Hally and Cedric walk back on the dirt road. They took their places quickly, with the look of innocence just before the two stopped right in front of them.

"Hi guys. Hally, I'll see you when I come back in time before school starts," Cedric spoke out, gave Hally a quick kiss before heading back towards his home, whistling a tune.

Hally waited until Cedric was out of sight before turning on the four boys,

"That was so low, spying on me and Cedric like that!" Hally cried out

All four boys started cackling in laughter, "I expect it from those three, but not you Ron Weasley! And you Ginny, couldn't you have stopped them somehow? Oh wait, you were pulled into this, I'm sorry," Hally ranted on glaring at the four boys.

"Aw come on Hal, we didn't mean any harm...how did he taste by the way?" Harry teased at her

Hally chased the four around in the yard, "You boys are rotten! I'm going to fix you four good," Hally exclaimed while Ginny quickly came to her aide by helping her on the chase.

"We surrender girls! We swear!" The boys cackled in laughter, getting slapped by Ginny and getting tackled onto the ground by Hally.

After everything calmed down, the boys were gathered at the table playing Wizard snap with Ginny playing along with them. Hally on the other hand sat upon a tall stool inside the Weasley's kitchen, watching Molly Weasley prepare their dinner closely. Ron as well as Harry noticed Hally keep her eyes on Molly's movements.

"Harry, what is she doing?" Ron asked

"Nothing Ron, that's just Hal. She's like this at home, watches the houseelves cook all the time," Harry answered with a grin at his sister.

Every few seconds, Molly would take quick glances at Hally, smiling at the raven-red-streak-haired girl's interest.

"Hally dear, wouldn't you rather play with the others or go outside instead?" Molly enquired

"No thanks Mrs. Weasley. Am I in the way by chance?" Hally asked politely

"Oh no dear. I thought perhaps you were getting bored by watching me for so long," Molly answered with a smile on her face.

Hally noticed the old stove the Weasley's had in their home, but kept quiet watching Mrs. Weasley cook until something caught her attention outside. She raised her head up as much as she could go seeing movement inside the Weasley's garden. Molly followed Hally's gaze a second later,

"Oh honestly! Those pesky things!" Molly grumbled while heading to their shelf of books, grabbing one and setting it down on the table. Harry noticed the cover reading,

"Gilderoy Lockhart's guide to Household Pests." There was a big photograph on the front of a very -good-looking wizard with wavy blonde hair and bright blue eyes. As always in the wizarding world, the photograph was moving; the wizard, who Harry supposed was Gilderoy Lockhart, kept winking cheekily up at them. Mrs. Weasley beamed down at him.

"Oh, he is marvelous," she said getting Hally's attention as she hopped down off of the stool to see what it was Molly was ranting about until she noticed the cover on the book.

"Oh gods! It's Lockhart!" Hally exclaimed making a face of disgust while Molly continued her ranting

"He knows his household pests, all right, it's a wonderful book..."

"Mum fancies him," said Fred, in a very audible whisper.

"Don't be ridiculous, Fred," Said Mrs. Weasley, her cheeks rather pink. "All right, if you think you know better than Lockhart, you can go out and get on with it, and woe betide you if there's a single gnome in that garden when I come out to inspect it."

Grumbling, the Weasley's slouched outside with Harry and Hally behind them. The garden was large, and in the twin's eyes, it was exactly what a garden should be. Harry remembered the Dursley's wouldn't have liked it--there were plenty of weeds, and the grass needed cutting--but there were gnarled trees all around the walls, plants Harry had never seen spilling from every flower bed, and a big green pond full of frogs.

"Muggles have garden gnomes too, you know," Harry told Ron as they crossed the lawn.

"They do?" Hally enquired "Yep," Harry answered her

"Yeah, I've seen those things they think are gnomes," Said Ron, bent double with his head in a peony bush, "Like fat little Santa Clauses with fishing rods..."

There was a violent scuffling noise, the peony bush shuddered, and Ron straightened up. "This is a gnome," he said grimly.

"Gerroff me! Gerroff me!" Squealed the gnome. Hally smiled at the sight of the gnome,

"Wicked! You caught a big one Ron," she grinned while Harry observed the gnome closely.

To Harry it was certainly nothing like Santa Claus. It was small and leathery looking, with a large, knobby, bald head exactly like a potato. Ron held it at arm's length as it kicked out at him with its horny little feet; he grasped it around the ankles and turned it upside down.

"This is what you have to do Harry," Ron said. He raised the gnome above his head (Gerroff me!) and started to swing it in great circles like a lasso. Seeing the shocked look on Harry's face, Ron added, "It doesn't hurt them--you've just got to make them really dizzy so they can't find their way back to the gnomeholes."

Ron let go of the gnome's ankles: it flew twenty feet into the air and landed with a thud in the field over the hedge.

"Pitiful," Said Fred, "I bet I can get mine beyond that stump, Lady Hex have you done this before?"

"No, we don't have too many of gnomes, mostly nymphs, and fairies," Hally answered

"Then you can learn like Lord Hex here," George grinned already swinging a gnome around like a lasso.

The twins learned quickly not to feel too sorry for the gnomes. Harry decided to just drop the first one he caught over the hedge, but the gnomes, sensing weakness, sank its razor-sharp teeth into Harry's finger and he had a hard job shaking it off---until---

"Wow, Harry---that must've been fifty feet..."

The air was soon thick with flying gnomes.

"See, they're not too bright," Said George, seizing five or six gnomes at once. "The moment they know the de-gnoming's going on they storm up to have a look. You'd think they'd have learned by now just to stay put."

"Sounds like they enjoy the de-gnoming," Hally sniggered

Soon the crowd of gnomes in the field started walking away in a straggling line, their little shoulders hunched.

"They'll be back," said Ron as they watched the gnomes disappear into the hedge on the other side of the field. "They

love it here...Dad's too soft with them; he thinks they are funny..."

Suddenly the twins had gotten an idea at the same time, "Hal, do you have that bouncing potion with you?" Harry asked his twin sister

Hally reached into the pocket of her black jeans, "Yeah, right here Harry," Hally answered handing Harry the vial. The Weasley's gathered around them.

"We need to get them to take this somehow, but how?" Harry spoke out thoughtfully

Ron grabbed a chipped saucer, handing it to Harry then sprinkled some wood shavings in the center of the dish.

"Gnomes likes this stuff! They can't get enough of it," Ron informed the twins

"One drop should do it Harry," Hally told her big brother, watching him take extra special care, and adding a drop onto the shavings.

Fred took the saucer and headed to the hedge placing it carefully down before moving away. They waited patiently until the crowd of gnomes came back, being lured to the shavings. They started to eat,

"Now we wait for it," Harry and Hally whispered waiting with the Weasley's

Suddenly they began to see the crowd of gnomes bounce around, some bounced higher than others, some bounced over the hedge and back. Mrs. Weasley came outside with Arthur looking at the awesome sight.

"What on earth...?" They noticed the children holding objects taking a swing at the gnomes

"SWACK!" "Gerroff! AAAAH!"

Arthur started laughing after hearing the sound. He turned to his wife, "Well Molly, they're getting rid of the gnomes for you," He chuckled while Molly could do nothing, but laugh at the scene.

Later that night, everyone was tucked into their beds. The sounds of light snoring surrounded the bedrooms upstairs, snuffling out two pairs of pattering feet, heading to Fred and George Weasley's bedroom. Harry opened the door quietly with Hally behind him. They tip-toed into the twin's room in sheer silence, each standing at the foot of their beds while Fred and George slept peacefully.

"Sorry boys, but we get you first," Hally whispered stifling a giggle

"Colorfaciushair" the twins muttered out shooting a charm onto Fred and George's red hair. Their hair started to blink like a muggle Christmas tree.

"See you two in the morning Lord Pranksters" Harry sniggered quietly with his twin sister as they headed out of Fred and George's bedroom, closing the door quietly behind them.

Chapter 7

"See you two in the morning Lord Pranksters," Harry sniggered quietly with his twin sister as they headed out of Fred and George's bedroom, closing the door quietly behind them...

THE NEXT MORNING...

The twins got ready the next morning, informing both Ron and Ginny on what they had accomplished on their twin brothers Fred and George. They all waited patiently for Fred and George to come out of their bedroom.

Fred woke up at the same time as his twin brother George, both sitting up and stretching their arms over their heads at the same moment, not noticing their hair blinking different shades of colors.

"Morning Fred," George yawned

"Morning George," Fred yawned next. He glanced over at George while George glanced back at him. Their eyes widened in sheer utter horror, pointing at each other's hair.

"They got us First!" they both exclaimed, scrambling out of their beds when there was a knock on their door.

"Oy, Mum says its time to get up you two or she'll jinx your beds again!" Ron called on the other side of the door.

They scrambled around the room in a frantic, each looking for something to cover their hair with until they found their Quidditch fan caps, putting them on their heads, and went to open their door. They peered their covered heads out, seeing Harry and Hally leaning up against a wall with Ron and their little sister Ginny.

"You were right Harry, you and Hally did get them first. First point goes to Lord and Lady Hex. See you two downstairs," Ron announced before cackling into laughter

Ginny covered her mouth giggling, following Ron, Harry, and Hally down the stairs.

Both Fred and George watched the four until they disappeared from their sight.

“Give them a chance to settle in...I swear George, if we haven’t figured Lady Hex out by now, then we’re done for,” Fred commented

“Yeah, I know...wait a second! Lord and Lady Hex can’t stand bright colors! We’ll jinx the furniture into bright colors and watch their reaction,” George suggested

“Too easy, and mum would throw a fit if we done that, but it is a good idea however,” Fred stated thoughtfully, trying to think of a way to get the twins with one good prank.

George leaned against the door frame, crossing his arms, “A shame that we can’t make their hair change to rainbow colors. They know about the toffees.” Fred muttered with a sigh before the thought came to them...spike their juice.

“That main ingredient looks just orange juice doesn’t it?” Fred enquired with a wide grin

“Yeah, even taste like it, and it doesn’t harm anyone either,” George answered grinning from ear to ear as well.

They scrambled into their room, searching until they found exactly what they were looking for, got ready for the day, and hid the bottle before they headed downstairs for breakfast.

They stepped off the last step finding Hally standing beside them sniggering.

“I must say boys I thought the thumb sucking ended after you turn a certain age, but I guess not,” Hally chided at them.

“Ha ha ha, very funny Lady Hex. We’ll give you both credit on sneaking up on us while we slept last night, but remember we

haven't given up yet," Fred and George grinned at her and clapped her on the back lightly.

"Ok, ok I'll stop with the teasing," Hally promised them while Ron, Harry, and Ginny stood near by sniggering

Molly was bustling about in the kitchen, doing her normal morning routine before glancing their way.

"Fred, George, it's your turn to set the table...why are you two wearing your fan caps in the house? Take them off this instant," Molly told her twins

"Sure mum," Fred and George spoke out simultaneously and tore their caps off their heads.

Molly pressed her hand to her chest in shock, "Oh my goodness! Honestly you two, your pranks are going to be the end of you both yet!" she lectured them sternly

Ron, Ginny, Harry and Hally stifled their sniggers. "Sorry mum," Fred and George only replied with innocent grins on their faces as they went to set the table.

George kept a look out on the twins seeing that they were too busy to pay attention to them while Fred gathered the juice glasses, setting them in their place around the table, and poured regular orange juice in the other glasses except for two. He poured their main ingredient into Harry's and Hally's juice glass. George finally went behind his brother Fred placing the rest of the dishes and silverware around the table.

Minutes later, everyone took their place at the table in their normal routine adding the twins among them, passing the platters of food around as usual. Everyone was eating their breakfast when the twins both reached for their glass at the same time, Fred and George hid their conniving grins from their view. They watched as the two took a drink from their glasses.

Ron was just about to ask Harry to pass the salt when he noticed Harry's and Hally's hair change to the colors of the rainbow right before his very eyes.

Clank! Ron dropped his fork onto his plate, his eyes turned toward his twin brothers who were covering their faces in their hands, sniggering. Ron leaned to his right, whispering in Harry's ear however, Hally heard him.

"They just got you both man. I have to give them points on this one," Ron whispered and pointed at Harry's hair.

Hally scrambled from the table quickly, and heading to the nearest mirror. Suddenly everyone heard a blood curdling scream come from Hally, making Molly jump up in surprise as she noticed the twins' appearance.

"What on earth..." Cackles of laughter came from Fred and George Weasley

"FRED! GEORGE! YOU TWO ARE IN SO MUCH TROUBLE!" Molly boomed in anger while Arthur rubbed the back of his neck, wondering what had just occurred at that moment.

Hally whirled around, glaring at her two best buds. "I AM GOING TO GET YOU BOTH!" she bellowed out while her twin brother stood up, glaring at the two who sat across from him.

"Make that the both of us!" Harry yelled

Fred grabbed a green Derby hat, and sat it upon Harry's head

"Tell me good sir, where shall we find your pot o' gold?" both Fred and George teased before cackling once more

Harry's mouth twitched, trying to fight a grin from coming on to his face.

"Funny guys, really," Harry simply said while his twin sister continued to seethe in anger.

Molly was trying to figure out how to change their hair back until Fred and George went over to where Hally stood glaring at them.

“Aw, come on Lady Hex. It was a harmless prank,” They both replied, trying to cheer Hally up

“That was a rotten thing to do,” Hally told them keeping a straight face

She looked over at her brother who looked back at her. They started to grin at last.

“Good one,” they both sniggered while Molly looked at the two as if they were mad until she figured it out...the four had some kind of prank war going on between them.

“Why you little sneaks! You did that to Fred and George?” Molly enquired

“Yes Mrs. Weasley,” Harry and Hally answered at one time

She turned to her twin boys next, “And you both did this to them?” she questioned

“Yes mum,” Fred and George answered simultaneously

Molly turned toward Arthur after hearing a roar of laughter erupt from him.

“It is not funny Arthur! Someone could get hurt!” Molly exclaimed

“Oh come now Molly, the only thing that happened was that they pranked each others hair, no harm has been done to anyone here,” Arthur reasoned

Molly closed her eyes quietly over the whole situation. She looked at the two sets of twins who stared back at her innocently. Molly threw her hands up with an exasperated sigh.

“I give up! I have a feeling if I ordered these four to stop; they would still find a way to continue this...thing. Just do not blow each other up, that is all I ask,” Molly informed them while shaking her forefinger at the two sets of twins.

“We promise Mrs. Weasley,” Harry and Hally spoke out

“Not to blow each other up,” Fred and George chorused together

The four went back to sit down while Molly watched them, shaking her head and wondering what in the world did she do to serve this torture.

Chapter 8

The four went back to sit down while Molly watched them, shaking her head and wondering what in the world did she do to deserve this torture...

After breakfast, everyone had his or her own special chores to be done. The boys went outside for gnome checking, and the girls went to help Molly Weasley around the house, doing a bit of cleaning and tidying up. The girls were both conversing in low key until Molly Weasley headed upstairs to gather the laundry next. Ginny watched her mother go up then looked up at the ceiling listening until she knew it was clear before turning to Hally with a grin.

"Fred and George said that you owned a doxie, is it really true?" she asked with interest

"I'm going to glue those two's lips shut," Hally whispered before giving Ginny an answer. "Yes I have a doxie...would you like to see him?" Hally enquired

Ginny threw a sofa cushion down onto the sofa without a care, clearly wanting to see Hally's doxie. Hally went to where her robes hung beside her twin brothers, and reached into the inside pocket, gently taking her doxie out for Ginny to see.

"This is Splinter Ginny, I found him at home when he was a wee bit smaller than now," Hally grinned holding her hand out with her palm open.

Ginny looked at the palm of Hally's hand finding a small doxie stretch and look up at her intently. Splinter smiled at her revealing his tiny sharp teeth.

"Wicked, but we better not let mum know that you have him here, or else she'll exterminate him," Ginny whispered in caution

"Oh, he knows to stay hidden...but that doesn't mean that he can't help me and Harry on our next prank," Hally grinned evilly after getting a sneaky devious idea.

Ginny stifled a giggle, "What do you have in mind?" she asked, interested to witness Harry's and Hally's next prank.

"Oh, let's just say that those two are in for a treat," Hally giggled then spoke in low key letting Ginny know what her idea was just before they heard Molly's footsteps upstairs.

"We'll tell Harry when we're done," Hally replied while they quickly scrambled to finish their chore.

Within the hour, everyone was finished with his or her chores, sitting down to relax. Hally whispered in Harry's ear, letting him in on her idea of their next prank. A smile began to creep along Harry's face. He took one quick glance over at Fred and George, who were too busy playing wizard snap, and turned his gaze back to his twin sister.

"That is so cruel Hal. You know I'm in for this one, Ginny go tell Ron, but make sure Fred and George doesn't hear you," Harry whispered quietly

Ginny set off to inform Ron what was about to happen next while Harry and Hally started to figure out how to pull their prank off.

"So how are we going to pull this one off?" Harry asked thoughtfully

"It has to be without Mrs. Weasley finding Splinter here Harry. Ginny told me that she would exterminate him if she found him here," Hally informed him

Harry stared at his sister in surprise before continuing, "Then we'll just have to set this prank off out here instead," Harry replied before going into deep thought when a question came to him...what would Fred and George's reaction be from seeing Splinter.

"Hal, what does Fred and George thinks of your doxie?" Harry enquired to his twin sister

Hally simply shrugged her shoulders, "They're ok with him, but they can't stand it if he messes with their concentration," Hally answered him

Harry snapped his fingers, grinning from ear to ear. "That's it! We'll get him to mess with their concentration right now," Harry whispered

"Wicked Harry. Splinter, we need you to go over and do whatever it takes to mess with Fred and George's concentration while they play their game, but no scratching, or biting," Hally told her doxie

Splinter stood up on his feet after hearing Hally's request. He gave her a wicked smile before setting off to where Fred and George were playing Wizard snap. Ron walked over to where Harry and Hally stood with a confused look on his face while Ginny walked with him grinning at them both.

"Harry, Ginny said that Hally has a...a doxie and that its part of your next prank?" Ron enquired looking from one to the other

Hally pointed over at Fred and George, "See for yourself Ron," Hally grinned while Harry pointed at Ron's brothers before crossing his arms, and observing the scene that was about to begin before their very eyes.

Splinter began fluttering in front of Fred, getting him to try to wave the doxie away, and then started to flutter in front of George's face getting him to do the same. They both raised their heads up to find Splinter hovering between them, and shaking his behind at them one at a time.

"Hey, look Fred a doxie," George commented

"Let's swat it and continue with our game," Fred stated

Both Weasley twins swung their hands at Splinter. Splinter swiftly flew out of their way just as their hands started to come towards him.

SLAP! SLAP! “Ouch!” Fred and George hollered out before hearing cackling laughter from Harry, Hally, Ron, and Ginny.

“Now that was funny! Do that again you two,” Harry cackled

“Yeah, but next time can you do that in slow motion so we can see it better?” Hally asked in between laughter

“I believe that this point goes to Lord and Lady Hex,” Ron laughed

“Fred, George, you two didn’t even see that coming!” Ginny laughed so hard that she had to hold her stomach

Fred and George looked up to see Splinter wave his finger at them before flying back to where Hally stood. It dawned on them just then...it was Hally’s own little doxie messing with them.

“Splinter! You had Splinter here all this time?” Fred and George asked Hally

“Hey, I never leave home without him,” Hally cackled out

The four watched as Fred and George abruptly got up on their feet, slowly heading toward them. Harry, Hally, Ron, and Ginny started to back away.

“I think that it is time for us to go inside now...uh yeah!” Hally exclaimed taking off

“I’m with you!” Harry agreed following suit

“Hey! Wait for us!” Ron and Ginny cried out after realizing that once again they were left behind.

Fred nodded his head at their retreating backs. “I think that we need a bit more strategy on the Lord and Lady Hex,” He commented

George gave him a quick nod, “I believe you are right Fred. It is time to break out our own wheezing wheezers on them,” George stated grinning along with his twin.

“We’ll wait until everything start to calm down, and then we’ll get them good, but we won’t hurt them of course,” they both replied at once sniggering.

An hour and a half later the twins, Ron, and Ginny were sitting around the kitchen table while Fred and George silently headed upstairs to their room, grabbing the smallest of their Wheezing Wheezers, and headed back down without being noticed.

They headed to the table sitting down at the far end, acting as if they were interested in Harry, Hally, and Ron’s wizard trading cards. George passed the small Wheezing Wheezes to Fred from under the table. Fred lit them up and tossed them onto the floor underneath the table....

“Zzzzzz! Pop! Pop! Pow! Pow! Pop!”

The twins, Ron, and Ginny let out a scream before heading for cover. Molly was up inside Percy’s bedroom, however, and could not hear the loud popping noises coming from under her kitchen table. Fred and George both hit the floor laughing over the scene. Harry, Hally, Ron, and Ginny peered their heads out at them after hearing their laughter.

“The three leaping Gryffindors plus one more!” Fred and George cackled out

Harry narrowed his eyes at them the same time as Hally.

“Why you sly...,” Harry began to yell

“Conniving Gryffindors!” Hally finished in a yell

“Thank you for the compliment Lady Hex!” Fred and George replied in between laughter

Ron went to peek under the kitchen table, “Hey! They just set off the Wheezing Wheezers!” Ron exclaimed looking back at the twins

“They what?” Harry and Hally questioned at once, heading to where Ron was and taking a look themselves while Fred and George continued to laugh

Ron shook his head at his twin brothers while Harry and Hally looked at one another, nodded, and walked over to where Fred and George were.

“I seem to remember that Ron and Ginny were off limits,” Harry commented loudly

“Yes, and the deal was that if they were pulled into the middle in anyway had to eat a doxie egg,” Hally stated grinning evilly at her best buds.

Fred and George sat up, still laughing. “There one problem with that, there’s not a doxie egg around here,” They sniggered until they noticed Hally raising her eyebrows while looking at her twin brother.

Harry grinned evilly at them while Hally went to her robes pulling out a box to show them.

“There’s not? Hmm I wonder what these may be,” Hally replied handing the box to her brother Harry.

Harry opened the box up, “Oh look, doxie eggs that we had found around Hagrid’s hut at school,” Harry cackled out while holding the box out towards Fred and George.

“Eat up boys,” Hally giggled at the two while Ron and Ginny both sniggered at the look of shock written upon Fred and George’s face.

Chapter 9

"Eat up boys," Hally giggled at the two while Ron and Ginny both sniggered at the look of shock written on Fred and George's face...

Harry held the box out waiting with an evil grin on his face. Fred and George both shuddered suddenly while everyone waited.

"Well go on then, it was the deal," Hally grinned evilly at the two

They watched as they both reached into the box while making a face, pulling out a tiny doxie egg each. The twins, Ron and Ginny watched as Fred and George popped them into their mouths simultaneously.

"Eww!" Ron and Ginny both exclaimed while Harry and Hally sniggered, waiting for Fred and George's response.

"Well go on, bite down you two," Harry grinned at them, closing the small box that he held

Fred and George scrunched up their faces, and closed their eyes. "CRUNCH! CRUNCH!"

The twins kept their faces masked while Fred and George felt a tiny liquid hit their tongues getting ready to yell out in disgust until they both smacked their mouths at once. They looked up at the twins

"Those aren't doxie eggs!" Fred and George exclaimed with wide eyes

Harry opened the box up peering inside, "It's not?" he asked them innocently

"No, it tastes like one of Lady Hex's candy," Fred and George replied pointing their fingers over at Hally

Hally peeked into the box innocently, "Hmm...oops! I guess they aren't doxie eggs after all," Hally commented before taking off with her twin brother, Ron and Ginny.

“Hey! Come back here Lord and Lady Hex!” Fred and George cried out chasing after the four outside their house.

They chased them all the way to the edge of the small woods. “Thought that was funny didn’t you Lord and Lady hex?” Fred and George questioned the twins

Harry sniggered while Hally swayed innocently, “Well it depends on what we thought was funny,” Hally replied to them

“There are so many things that we find funny,” Harry grinned at Fred and George

Both Fred and George crossed their arms, hiding the grins on their faces. “How about those so called doxie eggs?” They asked at one time

The twins merely shrugged their shoulders at them. “Hal thought that it would look cool making wizard rock candy that looks like doxie eggs,” Harry sniggered

“Yeah, the deal gave it just the right touch,” Hally sniggered next

Fred and George stared at them for at least a minute, “Good one,” they grinned at last patting the twins on their shoulders.

“Thank you, but the looks on your faces was ultimately priceless,” Hally giggled at them

“Especially when you two shuddered, now that was fun to see,” Harry stated in between laughs

Ron kept his eyes on the box that Harry was still holding, he clearly wanted to know what those fake doxie eggs tasted like.

“Hey Harry, can I try one of those? They may come in handy at the school for us since we can’t go into Hogsmead yet,” Ron enquired with a point

Both twins looked at him, blinking their eyes before Harry responded, "Sure Ron, here Ginny have one," Harry offered them one of the candies

One at a time Ron and Ginny reached into the box, taking out a fake doxie egg. They popped them into their mouths and crunched down onto the tiny candies feeling a tiny liquid hit their tongues.

"Wow, they're really good," Ginny admitted to the twins while Fred and George help themselves some more

Ron simply closed his eyes in content with a smile on his face, savoring the candy flavor. Fred and George nudged the twins lightly.

"All right now seriously we'll give it a rest for the day. Give us time to catch up on you both," They grinned

Both Harry and Hally kept a straight face. "Sure no problem," They told Fred and George while already scheming their next plot to each other with their minds.

'Sometimes even I wonder about Fred and George's mind,' Hally thought to her big brother

'You mean like how long does it take to catch on to us?' Harry enquired in thought to Hally

'That and when will they ever learn about us yet,' Hally thought back her answer to Harry

Harry couldn't help but stifle a laugh after hearing that remark inside his head.

Molly Weasley stepped outside searching around for them all, "Fred! George! Ginny! Harry! Hally!" she called to them. The six came running from the edge of the woods, curious as to why they were being called.

“Oh, there you all are. I Have to go to Diagon Alley to shop around since I’m out of a few things here, Ginny would you like to come along or stay here to keep Hally company?” Molly enquired

Ginny looked Hally’s way before answered, “I’ll stay here instead mum,” she answered before she and Hally took off giggling, leaving the boys behind.

Molly looked at her three sons sternly, “You three behave yourselves and keep the house in one piece please. Harry I’ll see you and your sister when I return dear,” Molly replied before heading back inside the house.

The next thing Harry knew it, he head a weird noise coming from inside the house. He turned toward Ron, Fred, and George.

“I thought she said that she was going to Diagon Alley?” Harry asked them

“She is Harry, another way,” Ron answered him with a grin on his face

Harry looked at the house, shrugged his shoulders, and took off with Ron Fred, and George to catch up with the girls.

They caught up with Hally and Ginny with no problems, finding the girls talking about the open area.

“it’s not huge, but you can play quidditch here,” Hally grinned looking from one end to the other

“Yeah, but they don’t let me play. They say that I’m not big enough to play quidditch,” Ginny commented looking at her three brothers

Hally whirled around in surprise, “Who says you can’t?” Hally questioned seeing Ginny point at her brothers.

“That was because you were too young then Ginny,” Ron replied with reason

Hally turned her eyes on Ron getting ready give him a retort when Fred and George intervened.

“It was also mum’s direct order Ginny. She didn’t want you to play until you were old enough,” Fred and George explained to their little sister

Hally listened to their every word, then shrugged her shoulders, “I can’t say I blame your mother actually, quidditch is a dangerous game,” Hally stated truthfully

Ginny clicked her tongue in annoyance. She was just about to walk away when everyone stopped her, “But no one can say that you’re not old enough now,” both Harry and Hally spoke out at once with grins on their faces.

They all headed back to the house their brooms excitedly for a nice fair game of quidditch.

Chapter 10 Licorice, jawbreakers, and wings oh my!

They all headed back to the house to gather up their brooms excitedly for a nice fair game of Quidditch (Grammar revised from last chapter, sorry for the mistake)...

Soon they were gathered together in the big clearing, each explaining to Ginny about how to play Quidditch before taking off into the air to see what position Ginny was best in. First Harry took it upon himself to test Ginny out on her seeker skills, he explained that his job consisted on looking out for the snitch, which was the smallest ball in the game, chase after it and catch it before the opposite team caught it first. Harry gave Ginny a demonstration before letting her take over, watching the youngest Weasley give it her best try on looking for the snitch. Ginny caught sight of the snitch, however after many tries; she could not seem to catch the little ball. Next Ron showed Ginny how the keeper position was played by explaining to her the strategy and demonstrating on how to keep the Quaffle, the biggest ball in quidditch from going through any of the three goal posts, then let her have a go at it. Ginny kept her concentration on the quaffle, but could not keep Hally from receiving points. After the tenth time around, Ginny shook her head, knowing that keeper was not in her at all.

Next came the beater position; however, Fred or George stayed with Ginny to make sure that nothing horrible happened to her since the bludgers were the medium sized and the most dangerous balls of the game. They each gave her a demonstration, and allowed her to give it a try at hitting the bludgers. When Ginny took a crack at a bludger, she never hit it hard enough for them to go out further. It took either Fred or George to crack them to get them to go farther out; they all decided then that Ginny would never make it as a beater.

Finally it was Hally's turn to take over, explaining to Ginny about her position of being a chaser was done and giving the youngest Weasley member a demonstration and allowing her to give it a try next while flying along with her. Both girls tossed the Quaffle back and forth to each other heading for the goal posts while Ron waited for them. Hally allowed Ginny to try to put the Quaffle through one of the posts, Ron got ready with a grin on his face, thinking that Ginny

would foul up on another position when she gave him a shock by making a score.

Ron snapped his head at his little sister while everyone else cheered, "She actually had gotten the Quaffle past me!" Ron exclaimed after getting over his shock.

"Finally a chaser in the family," Fred and George spoke out simultaneously

"I'd say she's a darn good chaser as well, what do you think Hal?" Harry asked his twin sister with a grin

"I think that Ginny is most definitely a good chaser," Hally answered grinning as well

Ron chewed on his lower lip, listening to their words before finally grinning.

"Well I guess being a chaser has its advantages," Ron commented grinning proudly over his sister's talent.

A light blush showed upon Ginny's cheeks in front of everyone, "Thanks guys," Ginny replied with a sigh of relief.

"Your welcome Ginny, I can even teach you some chaser moves if you'd like," Hally offered the red-haired girl with a grin

Ginny's eyes lit up as she smiled at Hally, "I'd like that very much. When do I get to tryout for the Gryffindor team?" she asked them eagerly

"You have to wait a year Ginny, but it couldn't hurt for you to stay in practice," Fred and George answered her truthfully

"But you three told me that Harry and Hally were put on the team just last year! Weren't they in their first year then?" Ginny Weasley questioned her brothers

Fred, George, and Ron shifted on their brooms before one of them gave their only sister an answer. "Well you see Ginny, it's a long story about that, but if you would listen quietly, I'll explain it to you," Ron spoke out while Harry and Hally remained quiet, not wanting to get in the middle of a small family squabble.

"Fine, I'll listen," Ginny told him, waiting for Ron's explanation.

Ron explained to Ginny the reason on why Harry and Hally both were put on the Gryffindor's Quidditch team, not leaving anything out while Ginny listened to his every word. When Ron was finished, Ginny was quiet for a few minutes before speaking.

"So basically if it wasn't for them helping another Gryffindor out, they wouldn't have been put on the team?" Ginny enquired to them at last

"Nope, they would have had to try out this year instead," Fred and George answered their little sister with grins on their faces.

Ginny gave their words a pondering thought, "Oh. I'll accept that then," she simply said, letting the matter drop.

"Come on guys; let's really play this game now. We'll even let everyone have a chance to ride our Nimbus Two Thousands," the twins grinned getting their attention.

"We're in!" The four Weasley's cried out before they began to play Quidditch once more.

A couple of hours later the six headed into the small house to relax and cool down from playing so much, that they all collapsed with a plop onto the sofa and a few chairs, Harry and Hally sat down next to each other as usual, sharing a chair for once. They heard Percy upstairs walking around on the second level, but left him alone, knowing that he'd want his privacy. Fred and George had their heads together while whispering on some sort of payback to the twins, however, Harry and Hally both had a sneaky suspicion that they were doing just that, and were leaning toward Ron and Ginny whispering to them over what they will be doing next.

"So it's agreed, we give them a chance to catch up and then get them back, but what are we going to do to them when the time comes?" Hally asked her twin brother in a whisper

"I created one that can move someone around in the air like a muggle rollercoaster from an amusement park, but they would be upside down of course," Harry answered in low key sniggering.

Hally stifled her giggles from her brother's news, "I can hardly wait to do that one," Hally grinned evilly along with her brother.

Now Fred as well as George was starting to get antsy over their private little prank war with the twins, seeing that they were ahead of them by one prank, which they were still trying to figure out on how to get them back for it. Suddenly an idea came to George, after much thinking, leaned to his twin brother whispering in his ear. Fred listened quietly to George's idea before a grin began to spread across his face.

"Let's go. Hopefully it should work without anyone getting hurt," Fred whispered getting up on his feet with George.

Harry, Hally, Ron, and Ginny noticed them leaving. "Where are you two running off to?" Hally asked while keeping a straight face

"Oh we're a bit tired, and decided to take a short nap," Fred and George answered simultaneously, Hally nodded her head at them doubtfully as they all watched the two head upstairs as quick as a flash.

"Right, they're up to something," Ron commented suspiciously while Ginny nodded her head in agreement.

"Let them go Ron. They deserve a chance to catch up, remember we did get them twice today with Hal's pet doxie," Harry replied, looking up after hearing Fred and George's feet take off running from above.

Fred tore his trunk open at the same time his twin brother George tore open his, each collecting what they needed in order for their prank to work. The minutes went by while they concentrated on their

task until they were finally finished. Before their very eyes were red licorice whips and everlasting jawbreakers...Harry's and Hally's favorite candies.

"Ok they're done. Do you still have that quill that can forge Snape's handwriting?" Fred questioned

George went through his school satchel, taking out his special quill, "Got it, now let's see what would Snap say in a letter to Lord and Lady Hex," George pondered loudly

"Well you can't say Lord and Lady Hex in the letter, they would know that we wrote it," Fred stated

"Duh, like I did not know that Fred...he always calls them by their adopted names from what I heard many times at school," George replied sniggering

"Wicked, make it good George," Fred sniggered next, allowing his twin brother to write the forged letter.

When the letter was finished, they looked out their window, looking for the family's owl when they had just spotted him flying toward the house.

"Quick George, intercept Errol before our prank is ruined..." "Sploosh" Errol landed in their wastebasket "Never mind" Fred simply said as they both headed for the owl swiftly

"Ok you pathetic excuse for a delivery owl, make sure you deliver the goods here, and don't foul it up," George spoke out to Errol who screeched at him in defense

"Just do it you silly bird, but make sure the packages goes to the right one," Fred spoke out next while Errol grabbed both packages with his talons taking flight to head through the front of the house.

Meanwhile the other's were talking to each other while Molly, who had just came back from her errands was getting ready to prepare dinner when their family owl flew in through the doorway and flopped

down onto the table in an awkward position. Ron got up shaking his head at the bird,

"Mail is here finally mum, late this time, but finally here," Ron announced taking a few letters from its beak.

Molly took the letters from Ron, and then glanced down noticing a package tied to Errol's leg. She looked over at the twins, "Harry, Hally you have a package from your father," She informed Harry and Hally both while she untied the package from their owls leg.

Both twins scramble to the table to see what was inside the package, tearing it open together, revealing their favorite candies.

"Dumbledore must have had dad send these as usual," Hally grinned excitedly seeing her favorite muggle candy red licorice whips inside the package

"Oh cool, I have to tell dad thanks as well as Professor Dumbledore," Harry grinned as he seen his favorite everlasting jawbreakers inside the package as well.

Molly only smiled at the two before continuing her task once more while both twins dove into their candy just as Fred and George came back down to witness the prank.

They both were grinning contentedly until Ron pointed at their faces in horror,

"Hey! You two have spots all over your faces!" Ron exclaimed getting Molly's attention

"Oh my goodness!" Molly cried out in horror while Ginny's eyes went wide

The twins looked at each other, and then heard Fred and George cackling in laughter. They narrowed their eyes at the two, "That went too far," Harry growled heatedly

"Especially with our favorite candy," Hally seethed

Ron did not make the matter any better as he continued to rant, "You two are breaking into a sweat Harry," He told them

Molly felt the twin's foreheads, "They're burning up! Fred! George you both are in trouble!" Molly shouted out at her twin sons.

Fred and George stopped laughing just then, "It was only supposed to change their face, not break them out into a fever..."

"I feel funny," Hally exclaimed suddenly

"Me too," Harry spoke out next

Molly ushered the two up the stairs quickly, "To bed with you both, I'm sure that it is not serious or else someone is going to answer to your father," Molly replied giving Fred and George a stern look.

Ron watched the twins go up the stairs with their mother before reeling on his brothers

"I understand that you two had to catch up, but I think that you two did go too far on this one," Ron commented

"I have to agree with Ron," Ginny replied

"Look you two, we never put anything in to give them a fever, just our normal stuff," Fred and George explained to them truthfully

Ron noticed that they were telling the truth when their mother came back down.

"I gave them something for their temperatures which started almost like clockwork, but they still feel funny from what they told me. Ron, Ginny check up on them in about an hour's time just to be safe," Molly spoke out while heading back to the kitchen with concern for the twins.

"Yes mum," Ron and Ginny simply said

"We'll go too, it's the least we can do," Fred and George told them feeling as though their victory wasn't such a good thing at all.

AN HOUR LATER...

Ron, Ginny, Fred and George headed upstairs to check up on the twins. Ron peered into his room at Harry with Fred while Ginny peered into her room at Hally with George. They're eyes went big as saucers at the twins before they looked at one another.

"Um...is it just me or did it seem that Harry had wings to you?" Ron blurted out the question

"Harry has wings too?" Ginny asked with wide eyes

"What do you mean too?" Ron questioned with a squeak seeing Ginny and George point at her room.

They swapped places peering into each other's rooms before looking at each other once more,

"Oh man, we're in big trouble," all four muttered while inside the bedrooms, the twins's wings stretched out wide while they napped in content.

A/N: Yes I put in wings for them lol. Sorry everyone if this update was sent out late, but had a winter storm where I am and my internet was down a few days because of it. That is all for chapter 10 see you in chapter 11 bye for now and I hope that you enjoyed this chapter -.

Chapter 11

"Oh man, we're in big trouble," all four muttered while inside the bedrooms, the twins' wings stretched out wide while they napped in content...

Fred, George, Ron and Ginny remained standing out in the hall quietly, trying to figure out how in the world will they be able to tell their own mother about the twins' condition when...

"What are you four up to? And where are the Lord and Lady Hex?" Percy questioned them, after sneaking up on them quietly

The four glanced at one another, shifting their feet awkwardly. Percy looked at them, narrowing his eyes in suspicion.

"Well? Mum told you to check up on them and see if they are feeling better enough to come down in time for dinner. So where are they?" Percy pressed his question

"Well you see Percy it's like this...", Fred and George began to explain

"They got wings!" Ron blurted out interrupting his twin brothers

They watched Percy's eyebrows go up in surprise, "Wings?" He enquired thinking that they were playing one of their practical jokes on him.

"See for yourself," Ginny answered pointing at her bedroom

Percy gave his little sister a side glance before peering inside her bedroom at Hally, who was still napping quietly on her left side.

"I don't see any wings...oh sweet Merlin!" Percy exclaimed after seeing Hally turn over onto her tummy with wings stretching out wide before contracting back in their place.

Percy went to Ron's bedroom next in quick strides, finding Harry in the same condition while one of his wings did a scratching motion to

his right side. Percy turned his head toward his twin brothers, Ron, and Ginny with wide eyes.

“Mum is going to go ballistic on you two,” Percy exclaimed to Fred and George

“We didn’t do that to them,” Fred and George told him simultaneously in self defense

“They didn’t Percy, we were with them this time,” Ron and Ginny spoke out

Percy pointed at both bedrooms, “They you explain how they had gotten those...wings...,” Percy’s voice trailed off remembering a subject he had studied in his third year.

“Percy?” Ron enquired wearily

“I have to say, given the circumstances on them being part veela that I would have to believe Fred and George as much as I hate to admit,” Percy commented with a shake of his head

“Why would you say that?” Ron asked with a gulp

“It’s hard to explain everything in detail, but from what I’ve learned, it is a fifty, fifty chance for anyone who was part veela to have wings, but as you can see Harry and Hally both are two of those rare cases,” Percy rambled in his usual way

The four younger Weasley’s scrunched their faces at him. “Can you at least talk normal like the rest of us Percy,” Fred and George replied rolling their eyes at them

Percy was just about to make a retorted remark when they heard the twins begin to stir, and their wings flapping until...

“OH MY GODS!” “WHAT THE...WHO PUT WINGS ON ME!”

Percy shook his head slowly, “It starts,” He simply said before pointing at the four

"A warning, don't do anything rash to get them angry, especially when they're like this. I'll talk to Hally in there with Ginny, you three find a way to explain all of this to Harry," Percy stated following Ginny into her room

"WHERE ARE THOSE TWO? THEY ARE GOING TO WISH..."

"Hold on there Hally, before you blow your top, I need you to listen to me very carefully," Fred, George, and Ron heard Percy reply before they headed into Ron's room

They found Harry staring at his wings in disbelief before glaring over at Fred and George. "Fred, George, come here a minute..."

"Wait Harry. Before you do anything, just listen ok?" Ron asked the raven-haired boy wearily

"Wait? Listen? To what, how they managed this one or that you were a part of this too?" Harry questioned heatedly

"They didn't do this one Harry. Ginny and me were with them. You and Hally..."

"What about my sister Ron?" Harry questioned with a growl

"You...both have...wings...Wait Harry! It's the veela part of you two, they didn't do it!" Ron bellowed out after seeing Harry get up after Fred and George.

Harry stopped in his tracks, "The veela part in me?" Harry questioned making a weird face

"Yeah, Percy just told us about it, he's talking to Hally right now," Ron answered while Harry grabbed his glasses, slipping them onto his face.

Harry grumbled under his breath while Fred, George, and Ron waited. "Well come on I guess. I'd like to hear this up front instead of our link for once," Harry told them heading out of the room.

They all filed into Ginny's bedroom, hearing Percy explain everything to Hally in a calm manner. Hally glanced over to where Harry stood with his arms crossed, noticing that her big brother did not like the situation either.

"So your saying that Harry and I are...stuck with these wings?" Hally questioned Percy

"Afraid so Hally, but you can get them to disappear from view, you two just...have to work on it," Percy answered

"I am not liking this at all," Hally mumbled, shaking her head

"Your not the only one," Harry agreed when they heard Mrs. Weasley call out to them from the bottom of the stairs.

"They're fine now mum!" Fred, George, Ron and Ginny cried out at once. They noticed the look on the twins' faces.

"You call this fine?" They both questioned with a shock look on them

Percy remained calm, "In your situation, this is normal you both came into your veela part on time, and stop worrying. Mum will understand everything," Percy replied getting ready to leave

Hally shook her head, "But Percy...", "I'm sorry Hally, but it is a part of you now, you just have to get used to it," Percy intervened

"Get used to it he says...I'm not used to it and I don't want to be used to it! I have a feeling that Hal doesn't either!" Harry seethed

Percy walked out the door, "Then you both have a major problem," Percy simply said heading downstairs.

The four remaining Weasley's stayed quiet while the twins brooded over their situation. "I don't like this," Hally mumbled out at last resting her chin upon her knees

"Me either Hal," Harry muttered with a sigh. He went to sit down beside her

"Oh cheer up you two. The good thing is, you can fly whenever you want to now without your brooms," Ron grinned at them until he seen them glare at him

"Your not helping them Ron, and they just got them, they wouldn't know how to fly yet," Fred and George replied, each giving him a nudge.

"And we certainly don't want to either!" Harry and Hally spoke out at once stubbornly

Ron looked at them as though they were mad, "Are you two serious? I would give anything to have wings like those, and I wouldn't trade them for anything...oh by the way, you can have your own special quills done with those, even sell them. I've seen it done many times," Ron pointed out

Both twins shook their heads at him, "Can I get rid of him now or later?" Hally enquired at last

"No, you'll only upset Mrs. Weasley Hal," Harry answered

"Hey, I'm serious here. Heck you can even have quills made up to give to your friends...",

"Ron you are not helping for the last time," Fred and George announced once more

"Wait you two. Quills made up for our friends?" The twins asked simultaneously

"Yeah! It would be so cool, your friends using your quills and everything," Ron ranted out

Harry made a weird face while Hally sniggered, "I think that Ron has some wishful thinking going on inside his head," Hally giggled out

"I do not!" Ron retorted "Oh ok Ron, you didn't just get excited over us making quills," Harry sniggered out

"Well I thought it would be cool," Ron mumbled looking over at Fred and George who shaking their heads at him

"We'll think about it Ron. Right now we need to get used to this...new...thing," Hally promised

"However Fred, George, you two has some major payback coming to you for messing with our favorite candy," Harry reminded them

Hally gave her two best buds a sly glance, "Oh yeah, I almost forgot about that," Hally grinned evilly next

Fred raised his hands up along with George, "Break time right now you two. It's just about time for dinner," They stated at once

Hally crossed her arms, "Fine, we'll give you that...for now," Hally replied

"Yeah, but we'll get you two when you least expect it," Harry agreed

They headed out of Ginny's room, heading downstairs to break the news about the twins easy to Molly.

During dinner; Arthur would glance at the twins every few seconds until Molly could take no more.

"Arthur!" Molly called out in slight anger, Arthur winced slightly over hearing the sound in his wife's voice.

"Sorry Molly...oh heck! I can't help it Molly, I think that it's a marvelous thing here with the twins," Arthur exclaimed

Harry and Hally both groaned quietly. "Arthur, can't you see that Harry and Hally here are feeling quite uncomfortable at the moment?" Molly asked getting highly irritated over her husbands antics.

“Well...yes, but they’ll grow into it I tell you! I work with several at the Ministry that felt uncomfortable at one time or another...does Severus know about this yet?” Arthur enquired suddenly to Harry and Hally both

“No,” They both answered quietly before hearing Molly’s announcement

“I took the liberty to inform Severus immediately when you two went outside with Ginny and our boys...oh relax Hally dear, your father will understand when he gets the message...,”

“Message?” Hally asked her

“Well yes, He was very busy at the time, so I had no choice, but to leave him a message with McGonagall,” Molly informed the raven-red-streak-haired girl

“Oh man,” the twins mumbled simultaneously, picking at the food on their plates with their forks.

MEANWHILE...

Severus had just sat down inside the Great Hall for dinner along with the other professors when Minerva McGonagall cleared her throat to get his attention.

“Minerva, what would take for you to leave me in peace this year?” Severus questioned with a sigh of irritation

“Oh I’m not wanting to bother you at the moment Severus, but I have a message for you that is important,” McGonagall answered

Dumbledore raised his gleaming eyes up slightly, staying out of the conversation.

Severus held his hand out for his message.

“Sorry, this one is not written, but I will quote you word from word...Severus the twins had became ill earlier today. Their illness

has passed, however they have somehow came into receiving veela wings. Please return a reply when you get this message, Molly Weasley Little Burrow the Hollow,” McGonagall spoke out with a slight grin on her face, Severus’s face go from one mood into another swiftly.

Severus threw his napkin down onto the table heated. He then noticed Dumbledore contemplate on his dish as though he never heard the message.

“DUMBLEDORE! YOU DIRTY OLD MAN! YOU KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN DIDN’T YOU?” Severus demanded his question

Dumbledore smiled with twinkling eyes, “Would you have believed me Severus?” He questioned

Severus got up from the table swearing loudly. He walked between the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw tables heading out of the Great Hall in sheer anger, but not before yelling at Dumbledore once more.

“REMIND ME OLD MAN TO GIVE YOU A SET OF HORNS TO MATCH THAT TAIL OF YOURS!” He bellowed out before slamming the doors closed.

Minerva’s mouth dropped open with a wide smile, “My goodness! Severus certainly has some colorful words doesn’t he?” she questioned while looking at the headmaster

“Indeed,” Dumbledore simply said with a chuckle.

BACK AT THE BURROW...

Everyone was suddenly engrossed in the conversation when they heard a noise coming from the family’s fireplace. They turned their heads finding Severus stepping out, brushing the soot off his robes. Harry and Hally both were suddenly trying to find a place to hide until Severus pointed over at them.

“Stay exactly where you two are!” He ordered sternly

“Man,” Harry and Hally groaned, getting ready for the outcome

Molly stood up from the table, “Now Severus, they are innocent on this,” she reasoned at him

Severus stared at her with piercing eyes, “I am fully aware of that Molly, however I want to know when did this happen?” Severus questioned while his eyes strayed towards the twins.

“When they were resting Severus,” Molly answered, keeping her ground

Severus crooked his finger at the twins, watching as they reluctantly walked over to where he stood. He noticed them feeling uncomfortable over the situation. He walked around them quietly, scanning every detail of their wings with his eyes.

Hally started to breath heavy, “Dad...,”

“Calm down Raven, you are not being judged here nor is Connor,” Severus told her

“Don’t like it,” Hally whimpered lightly

“Me either,” Harry muttered when Severus stood in front of them

“So the colors on your wings from what I have noticed means nothing to you two?” Severus questioned them with a raised eyebrow

“Colors?” They asked him at once

Severus took a feather each from the twins’ wings, “Ow! That hurt,” They cried out until they were shown a feather.

“This one came from you Connor, and this one came from you Raven which shows the difference of you both since you are both twins,” Severus informed them

Ron got up from the table, clearly wanting to see the difference of the feathers.

"Oh cool! They are different, Harry has green in his and Hally has black!" Ron cried out

"Ronald Weasley, you come back to the table this instant...Fred! George!" Molly yelled seeing her twin boys go over for a look next

"Wicked, but they weren't there earlier," Fred and George both grinned

Severus listened to them intently, "Then from what you both are telling us, they had just received them before you had checked up on them. And it would also explain why they were experiencing an sudden illness," He explained to everyone seeing relief fall upon Molly Weasley's face

"But how long will we stay like this?" Harry and Hally asked Severus at one time

"Not too much longer you two, this is natural for veela so remain calm," Severus answered them before looking at the time.

"I am going to be behind schedule if I remain here any longer..."

"So how is the big fat fraud dad?" Hally blurted her question out

"A big pain as always Raven. Now behave yourselves, do not get into any trouble, and I will see you two in a few weeks in Diagon Alley to gather your things for school," Severus answered, reminding them to mind their manners before he flooded out.

Molly placed her hands upon her hips looking at Hally, "Big Fraud?" She questioned

Hally grinned at her innocently, "I was talking about Sinistra," Hally answered with a masked face

Harry sniggered, "Lockhart is the funniest looking Sinistra I have ever seen," Harry mumbled

“Lockhart...Hally, you silly girl,” Molly raised her hands up in surrender before sitting back down.

“Come along before everyone’s dinner gets cold,” Molly beckoned to the twins, Fred, George, and Ron to finish their dinner.

LATER THAT EVENING...

Ron, Ginny, Harry and Hally were gathered inside Ron’s room after everyone headed to bed. They waited until everything went silent, including Fred and George’s bedroom. Hally, Ron, along with Ginny were in a fit of giggles after Harry explained how their next prank was going to work.

“When the clock strikes is when the prank will start to go off. We will be able to get a good view outside since they’ll be going out the window,” Harry informed them before cackling into laughter

“Oh gods Harry, you two are evil,” Ron laughed, Ginny could only giggle in hysterics with Hally.

“Thank you Ron. Come on let’s go, it’s almost time,” Harry grinned evilly

The four tip-toed out of the room, sneaking downstairs, and headed outside under the stars with the full moon as their light.

Inside Fred and George’s room, everything was quiet except for light snoring coming from both twins. From inside the house the clock chimed the hour of Midnight. Music started to play inside Fred and George’s room as well as outside where Harry, Hally, Ron, and Ginny were.

Suddenly Both Weasley twins were woken up swiftly after being levitated upside down in mid-air.

“Hey! What’s going on?” They both cried out in confusion until they both headed out of their window one at a time.

The twins, Ron and Ginny were sniggering until Harry pointed up with an evil grin.

“Here they come,” He cackled

Hally, Ron and Ginny looked up, bursting into hysterical laughter while Fred and George moved around in time with the music.

“Fred, Help me out here!” George cried out

“How can I when I’m in the same predicament!” Fred exclaimed

They started going into loop-de-loops, curves, going high above and started yelling thinking that they were going to hit the ground until they went back up once more. They noticed the twins, Ron and Ginny looking up at them, laughing at the sight.

“They got us!” Fred and George yelled out before the music started to end.

They watched Fred and George head back into their bedroom window.

“Quick before we’re caught outside,” Harry ranted as they quickly and quietly headed back into the house, heading upstairs before the rest of the household woke up over the commotion.

The four split up just before Fred and George came out of their room, Harry and Ron going into Ron’s bedroom, and the girls heading into Ginny’s room closing the doors swiftly.

They heard movement coming from Arthur and Molly’s bedroom, heading to Fred and George’s room. They quickly dived into the beds covering their heads, and feigning sleep.

Within a few minutes time Both Arthur and Molly peered into both rooms after investigating the loud commotion that came from Fred and George’s room as well as outside.

“Arthur I told you that this war was getting out of hand,” Molly whispered

“Now Molly, no one had gotten hurt, and it was funny from what Fred and George told us,” Arthur replied, laughing a bit in between his words.

“I’m not going to like this outcome Arthur,” They heard Molly say just before they closed both doors.

A minute later, Molly and Arthur heard sniggers, giggling, and laughter coming from Ron and Ginny’s room, stopping them in their tracks. What completed the whole situation was hearing Fred and George cackle out from their rooms next and hearing “Good one!”

Molly closed her eyes while she shook her head. Arthur lead Molly back to their room, stifling chuckles each step that he took.

A/N: That is all for chapter 11. See you in chapter 12 bye for now.

Chapter 12 CALLING ALL STOMACHS

Molly closed her eyes while she shook her head. Arthur lead Molly back to their room, stifling chuckles each step he took...

THE NEXT DAY

The morning sun began to shine through Ginny's bedroom window, beaming down into Hally's face. Slowly her eyes blinked open before she screwed them shut from the sunlight, turning her face away from the window, and looking over to find Ginny still sound asleep. Hally remained in bed a few more minutes longer, listening to the silence from the household before she quietly slipped out of bed.

Hally went to the window, peering out at the new day when her twin brother's voice popped into her head. 'Well at least I'm not the only one who is awake early. Morning little sis, did you sleep well?' Harry thought to her

Hally grinned to herself, 'Yes Harry, I actually did sleep well last night,' Hally thought back her answer to her brother

Harry grinned to himself after hearing her answer until he heard Ron let out a loud snore, looking over at the red-haired boy...nothing seemed to wake Ron up, especially early in the mornings. Harry quickly and quietly slipped out of bed.

'Hal, I'll meet up with you in about thirty minutes...make that forty-five minutes since we have to share a bathroom here. You go first,' Harry made a reply to his little sister

'Ok Harry, see you in forty-five minutes,' Hally answered him before their minds became silent once more.

Hally rumbled through her things, trying to keep quiet so not to wake Ginny from her sleeping peacefully. Hally was just about to head to the bathroom, when she heard the girl stir and look up at her.

"Morning Hally," Ginny mumbled groggily

"Morning Ginny, I'm just going to get cleaned up. I'll see you when I get done," Hally replied with a grin before heading to the bathroom.

Meanwhile Harry was collecting his things together when he heard Ron finally stir in his bed, sitting up and looking around the room. Ron let out a yawn while scratching his head.

"Morning Harry. Your up early," Ron greeted the raven-haired boy

"Good morning Ron. I am always up early, although it is not that early. It is only eight in the morning. I'll be in the shower after Hal gets done," Harry greeted in return heading out to wait for his turn for the bathroom.

Before long there was a line forming behind Harry while Hally was just about done with the shower. She came out heading while Harry went inside going past her finding the younger Weasely's lined up for their turns.

"And there she is our own Lady Hex getting ready for the day," Fred and George grinned at her

Hally gave them her best grin, "Oh good morning to you too Fred and George," Hally greeted them before giggling at them both

"That was one awesome prank you two did on us last night, how did you two manage that one?" Fred enquired

"That would be Harry's doing boys. I'm not that good with the charms just yet, but I am getting there," Hally sniggered

"Lady Hex made a confession, the world will never be the same," George teased Hally with a grin

"Hey, Harry is still learning his Potions too boys, so you can say that we pretty much even out," Hally replied giving the two a sweet smile before walking down the hall to finish getting ready

Minutes later Harry emerged from the bathroom in his robe while Ginny went inside next going past him.

"And here comes Lord Hex, tell us how did you manage to keep us up in the air like that?" Fred and George asked Harry

Harry grinned at them, "You were both on a timer charm in which I had added with a little of this and a little of that," Harry answered them, not wanting to let out all that he had put into the jinxing charm.

"Aw come on Harry, you can tell us," Fred and George begged him

"If you want to find out, then you'll just have to wait for it to be put into the Hexers notebook," Harry grinned evilly before walking down the hall to finish getting ready for the day.

"Darn, have to wait for it," Fred and George snapped their fingers at one time with grins on their faces

"Yep," Harry simply said after hearing their words, walking into Ron's bedroom.

Forty-five minutes later, both twins met up with each other downstairs waiting for the others to follow. Molly Weasley was already in the kitchen preparing breakfast for everyone. Hally who was used to lending a hand with their houseelves, could only watch and observe Molly quietly. Harry hid his face from view, stifling sniggers here and there over his sister's antics.

Hally turned her head noticing Harry trying his best to keep from sniggering, "Stop laughing at me Harry," Hally grinned at him while she sat down beside him after watching Molly.

"Can't help it Hal, I can see that you want to cook something here just by your actions," Harry admitted with a grin

Hally let out a sigh, "I know I promised you and dad that I wouldn't try to cook while I'm here, but it's so hard to keep my word on that," Hally confessed quietly

Harry took a good look at his twin sister, realizing that she was right, she was having a hard time with not doing anything while they were guests at the Weasley's home.

"I can see that Hal, if you can wait a bit longer, I think that Mrs. Weasley will be out again today on errands, which should give you a chance to fix us all something to eat while she's out," Harry whispered

"Yes, but Harry what is here is the only thing that they have, I can't just take what's theirs and not have second thoughts about it," Hally whispered back while nudging her head towards the kitchen

"It doesn't have to be much Hal, there is flour and you are good with baking great things, that will be enough," Harry grinned getting his little sister to smile at him

"Thanks Harry," Hally simply said just before the rest of the Weasley clan scrambled downstairs

"Thanks for what?" Fred and George asked them suddenly, thinking that they were already plotting their next prank on them

"Hal is going to make us all something while your mum is out doing errands," Harry whispered to them

That bit of news got Fred and George excited, "We can't wait," they told them quietly grinning from ear to ear.

Ron sat down at the right side of Harry, "Me either," He said getting looks from the four. "Hey, I'm not that stupid, especially from their first Birthday party. The food was really good," Ron admitted

Harry sniggered along with his sister Hally until she got an idea on their next prank to Fred and George. She kept a straight face in front of them; however, Harry heard her thoughts, but remained silent. Molly called out to Ron and Ginny reminding them that it was their turn to set the table.

"Man, come on Ginny," Ron groaned a bit getting up from the sofa

"We'll help you two Ron," Harry offered giving Hally a sly glance, letting her know that he heard her

"Oh you two don't have to, besides your our guests," Ron was trying to reason with them, but instead got a slight shove from Hally.

"We insist Ron," Hally spoke out through her clinched teeth

Ron was just about to protest, when he heard Harry clear his throat. He then knew that the twins had some kind of plot coming to his twin brothers Fred and George. Ginny caught on as well after being around the twins for a couple of days, remained silent, but also wanted to find out what they were up to next.

They started setting the table whispering, "So Hal, can you do it without any of us four getting...well you know?" Harry asked in a quiet whisper

"Yeah Harry I can, I got dad with it before we met last year. There's an antidote that will keep us from feeling the effects, but those two are in for a...sweet treat," Hally spoke in very low key with an evil grin on her face.

"Uh-oh," Ron mumbled, ducking his head from view while he sniggered quietly

"I can't wait to see this," Ginny whispered, keeping a straight face

They all four looked over to where Fred and George were sitting, noticing that they were too much into one of their games. Hally looked away from them setting a juice glass down.

"They won't know what hit them," Hally whispered hearing her brother, Ron, and Ginny snigger over her words quietly.

THAT AFTERNOON

Everyone lingered around outside, waiting for when Molly headed out to do her usual errands, Harry played Wizards Snap with Ron, Fred

and George while Hally shuffled through her latest wizard fashion Magazine with Ginny. What seemed like hours, but were only minutes; Molly Weasley finally emerged from the house, informing them that she would be out doing a bit of shopping and will be home in time to make dinner. They watched as she disappeared in front of them before Hally quickly scrambled inside the house with Ginny while the boys stayed outside.

Ginny went through the cupboards for each item that Hally needed to use, while Hally concentrated on what she was going to make. Soon a delicious scent filtered throughout the house, heading outside to where the boys were. They all took a deep breath, their mouths already watering for what was in store for them.

Hally went to her robes taking out two different colored vials before heading back to the kitchen area with Ginny. Hally put several drops of one potion onto the fresh baked chocolate cake and handed the other one to Ginny, telling her to take a drink. Ginny did as she was told, not asking any questions when Harry and Ron finally came in to do the same without Fred and George noticing that they were missing from outside. Hally was the last to take a drink from the vial, shuddering while making a face.

“Ok, go get those two look alikes Ron, and don’t say anything,” Harry and Hally both grinned evilly while Ginny let out a small giggle before masking her face well.

“No problem you two,” Ron told them heading to the door

Fred and George were lying on the ground looking up into the sky. Ron stifled a snigger before collecting himself.

“Hey, Hally wanted me to let you two know that it’s ready,” Ron announced turning away from the door.

Fred and George quickly headed inside the house, heading into the kitchen area and sitting down at the table in their usual seats. Hally started slicing the cake for them, setting them on saucers and passing them down the line. Everyone started to eat, savoring the

sweetness when Fred and George's stomachs began to make funny sounds.

Ron looked at the two, "Um Fred, George, is something wrong?" Ron enquired

"Gas," they both answered at once, rubbing their stomachs before eating once more until...

"PHAAA!" Both Fred and George suddenly turned red in the face after everyone looked their way

Ron waved his hand back and forth with a scrunched face, "Oh Gross!" he cried out

Ginny leaned back making a face at the two, "Gods you two stink!" She exclaimed

Both Harry and Hally looked at Fred and George with wide eyes.

"What did you two do?" Hally asked them innocently

"You two have some major bodily functions," Harry spoke out

Suddenly they watched the two quickly get up from the table and run upstairs, holding their stomachs.

"Is something wrong?" The twins asked Fred and George

"BATHROOM!" They heard them yell out

"Really? Did the cake settle hard on your stomachs?" Hally asked them sweetly

They stopped on the mid step after hearing her words, turning to see Hally prop her hand under her chin. "Lady Hex...Good one...excuse us!" They told her disappearing from their sight.

"Thank you. I believe Harry that we win this prank war," Hally giggled out

"I believe you are right little sis," Harry cackled out while Ron and Ginny laughed in hysterics.

For at least two and a half hours, they would see Fred and George run upstairs to the bathroom, sniggering at the sight.

A/N: That is all for chapter 12. See you in chapter 13 bye for now.

Chapter 13

For the next two and a half hours, they would see Fred and George run upstairs, sniggering at the sight...

The potion had worn off just in time before Molly Weasley returned with her purchases. Fred and George went to their knees in front of the twins, bowing down at their feet.

"We are not worthy!" Fred and George grinned after they received the finally score on their prank war

The twins crossed their arms, smiling triumphantly. "Aw the sweet smell of victory is priceless," They cackled in laughter

Ron gave them a sly glance, "I wouldn't call it a sweet smell," Ron sniggered

Ginny could only laugh at her twin brothers, "Well at least someone is capable to take you two on," she teased them

Fred and George looked at their little sister, feigning shock, "Who Lord and Lady Hex?" Fred asked with a tease

"They rule the school compared to us, but at least we had a great prank war," George grinned

"Well yes, considering that I have Peeves on our side," Hally added bursting into giggles

"Peeves?" Ginny enquired. Ron rolled his eyes with a grin on his face.

"The school Poltergeist Ginny, Hally is the only student that he will listen to, besides Harry now of course," Ron explained

Hally shook her head at the red-haired boy, "No, he also listens to the Bloody Baron," Hally stated truthfully remembering what her brother Harry had done to Peeves to get him to leave the night when they encountered the dark lord.

Harry looked away grinning from ear to ear while getting a look from his sister. "Yeah, Peeves is afraid of the Bloody Baron," Harry sniggered

"it's not funny Harry. You had Peeves looking like he swallowed something bad...and he's a poltergeist for Merlin sake," Hally grinned at her brother

"It worked though didn't it? He left the third floor," Harry pointed out

Hally shook her head feigning a sigh, "I suppose he did...eep!" Hally squealed into laughter after Harry tickled her left side

Ron chewed on the inside of his mouth before speaking, "Harry, Hally can you two do me a favor next time?" he asked them

The twins both looked at him, "What is it Ron?" they asked him

"Next time when something happens like that, could you two let me at least help you out?" Ron asked them seeing the two look at each other

"Um...I don't think..." "Oh come on Hally. It's not like something is actually going to happen," Ron pleaded

"I never said no to you Ron," Hally exclaimed

"I know that, but just don't leave me out next time that's all," Ron mumbled

Hally let out a slight groan before turning to her big brother. Harry took it from there, "We'll let you in on it next time Ron, we promise," Harry replied while Hally looked away quietly, Ron beamed at them.

"Well everyone is still in one piece here," Molly spoke out as she walked into the house. Fred and George put their fingers up to their lips to everyone behind their mother's back, telling them to stay quiet so not to get Molly upset.

They each took a package from Molly, and heading to the kitchen to put everything away. Molly went to make a pot of tea when she noticed several items out of place. The cake was gotten rid of after the twin's prank went off perfectly.

"Who moved my things around?" Molly questioned everyone

"I did Mrs. Weasley. I was looking for some sugar earlier, wanted to make some lemonade," Hally fibbed with a straight face.

"That is quite all right Hally dear," Molly replied letting the subject go

Ron leaned Hally's way, "You should be so lucky, mum always gives us a lecture if we moved her things like that," He whispered

"Well I did move them around Ron, I didn't lie about that," Hally whispered back

"Anyway, we got rid of the cake, that's what matters," she added in low key while Molly tied an apron around her waist to begin to start dinner.

The rest of the day went on with the twins' enjoying themselves with the Weasley clan. They all sat down that evening for dinner, talking to one another, joking around while Arthur and Molly glanced at each other with a questionable look upon their faces. Arthur cleared his throat getting their attention. They turned his way after quieting down.

"Fred, George, I take it that you're little war with Harry and Hally here is over?" Arthur questioned them. Sniggers came from Harry and Hally suddenly.

"Yes dad, it's over," Fred and George answered him with a grin on their faces

They all started to speak once more until Arthur slapped the table in frustration. He wanted to know who would reign on the four's little prank war.

"Well come on you two. Tell us that you both won and be done with it," Arthur spoke out

"We didn't win the prank war dad," Fred and George informed the oldest Weasley member

Arthur looked at them in surprise, "You two didn't win, so that means...?"

"We won Mrs. Weasley," the twins announced triumphantly

Arthur turned their way, blinking his eyes while Molly's fork hit her plate with a clink. "You two?" Molly questioned them both in shock, Harry and Hally both nodded at her.

"There now, you see Molly? Just like their father James. They can both hold their own. What did you two do to get them to surrender...,"

"Arthur!" Molly cried out "May that be a lesson boys, to not go over your heads with your pranks," Arthur quickly replied after wincing over his wife from yelling out his name.

"Well I for one am glad that this whole situation is finally finished. Someone could have gotten hurt or worse ended up in St. Mungos," Molly lectured them suddenly

Moans and groans erupted from everyone while they listened to Mrs. Weasley continue to lecture the two sets of twins. Hally pinched the bridge of her nose quietly until she came close to not being able to take it any more.

"And if there is another prank war in the future, I will be ending it quite soon...,"

"Can I be excused?" Hally blurted her question out

"In a moment young lady. Now then...Arthur! Stop looking at me like that! I will not have anyone getting hurt while the twins are here...,"

This time both twins interrupted her, “Mrs. Weasley, may we be excused? We’re finished,” Harry and Hally requested at once

“Just a moment now you two. Now I understand that Harry and Hally are not ours, but we are responsible for them for their well being while they are here,” Molly continued on with her lecturing while Harry and Hally looked at one another grinning from ear to ear.

‘Should we interrupt her again big brother?’ Hally enquired in Harry’s head

‘Heck no! I’m actually starting to like having another parent give us one of their lectures,’ Harry thought back to his twin sister

They leaned back in their seats, watching Molly ramble on with her lecturing.

Later that evening, the six children had made a hike up the hill from down the dirt road, lying down and looking up at the stars. Fred, George, Ron, Ginny, and Harry were calling out and pointing to constellations. Hally on the other hand, was noticing something else when she looked up at the stars, but kept it to herself as well as her thoughts.

Ron sat up looking at the twins, “So how do you two like our home? It’s not much to look at...”

Both twins grinned widely, “It’s one of the best homes we’ve ever been in.” Everyone started cackling after seeing Ron’s ears go pink.

For the next few weeks, the twins along with the Weasley clan occupied themselves by having their own game of Quidditch until the summer grew hotter by each passing day to where the Young Weasley’s lead the twins to a cliff one day, showing them a closed in watering hole that was kept hidden well. They dived into the water going under one at a time, to keep themselves cool from the summer heat during the day while at night they would linger around in the cool summer night breeze.

Before everyone knew it, the twin's birthday arrived at last when Harry and Hally both had woken up to hearing Molly Weasley yell from downstairs. They scrambled down the steps to investigate finding the woman stand in the middle of her kitchen with her arms crossed, highly irritated. They soon found out why, for right in front of Molly stood their father's houseelf Screech, standing his ground to the woman.

"Be that as it may, this is my kitchen, and I will make sure that everything goes well, not some...houseelf that shouldn't be here in the first place!" Molly shouted out

Soon the rest of the Weasley came downstairs, standing behind the twins to see what the loud commotion was all about, Percy included.

Screech raised his chin up defiantly, "AND SCREECH SAYS THAT MASTER GAVE HIM ORDERS TO HELP WITH THE TWINS' BIRTHDAY PARTY!" Screech bellowed out

"Uh-oh," Harry muttered "Oh no," Hally mumbled just before they hurried over to where the two stood, making sure that a fight did not break out. Molly looked as if she was about to explode.

"Screech, stop fighting with Mrs. Weasley. It is her home," the twins reasoned with the houseelf

Screech rounded on them next, "Is Screech master's head houseelf?" he questioned them

"Yes Screech...", "And Doesn't Screech make sure everything goes fine for twins?" Screech drilled at them

"Yes Screech...", "THEN TELL WOMAN THAT SCREECH MUST OBEY ORDERS!" Screech boomed at the twins

Hally let out a groan while Harry rubbed the back of his neck, they looked up to see Molly looking at them with a daring look on her face.

"Perhaps Screech can...", Hally began reluctantly

“Help you out Mrs. Weasley?” Harry finished their request

Molly was just about to decline their request when she noticed that both twins were feeling quite uncomfortable over hers and Screech’s squabbling.

“Oh all right, but one foot stepped out of line and he goes back to your home,” Molly agreed finally

“Screech?” The twins asked at once

“Screech agrees, so long as she remembers,” Screech answered pointing at Molly

Both twins blew out a sigh of relief after hearing the two agree.

A/N: That is all for chapter 13 see you in chapter 14 bye for now and Happy Valentines Day.

Chapter 14

Both twins blew out a sigh of relief after hearing the two agree...

Molly Weasley took the moment to realize that the twins as well as her own children were still in their night attire.

"Why don't you two dears head upstairs and get ready for your big day," Molly suggested to Harry and Hally both.

The two started to head upstairs with the rest of the Weasley clan, wearily in case another fight erupted between Mrs. Weasley and their fathers houseelf.

Molly noticed their movements and just waved her hand at the two, "Go on now. We'll be just fine down here...What would you two like to have for breakfast...?"

"Screech knows what they like! Screech help lady fix it!" Screech beamed up at Molly, and then at the twins.

Hally stopped at the middle of the stairs looking down at Screech, "Screech..."

"Shoo Miss Hally! Shoo Master Harry!" Screech ordered at the two sternly

They did not waste any more time, scrambling up the stairs with the others rather quickly. They reached the top of the stairs, each heading into two separate bedrooms to gather up their things for the bathroom. Fifteen minutes later a line had formed with the Weasley's letting Harry and Hally go ahead of them.

Ron tapped on Harry's shoulder while Hally was occupying the family bathroom, "I see what you two meant about your father's houseelf," Ron commented

Harry looked over his shoulder at him, "Yeah, but he means well Ron. Actually we kind of like Screech playing mother hen to us sometimes," Harry replied grinning from ear to ear.

Hally finally emerged from the bathroom, still towel drying her hair and mumbling inconsistently. Ron raised his eyebrows up at her

“Um...Hally...” Hally’s head whipped his way glaring daggers at him
“Never mind,” He squeaked and gulped loudly.

Hally was just about to lash out at the red-haired boy when Harry realized what was wrong with his twin sister by interfering swiftly.

“Hal, go take your medicine!” Harry pointed toward Ginny’s room

Hally turned her head his way, glared at him before heading to Ginny’s bedroom, grumbling while everyone watched her in stunned silence. Ron looked at Harry in shock. Harry gave Ron a slight glance before replying.

“Steer lightly around Hal for a couple of days Ron,” he simply said heading into the bathroom next and closing the door behind him.

After the seven children were finished getting ready, they headed downstairs for breakfast. Ron and Ginny were just about to go and set the table when they noticed the table was already set with platters of food waiting for everyone. Molly was sitting down in her chair looking over at Screech wearily. Harry and Hally both looked over at Screech looked at Mrs. Weasley and quickly took a seat knowingly.

Ron stood beside Molly with a confused expression written upon his face, “Uh mum...,”

“Sit down all of you before he starts his rambling again,” Molly exclaimed in a hushed tone

“Rambling? What rambling mum...,”

“Ron do as he says before Screech gives you such a lecture that will make your ears turn deep red instead of pink,” Hally intervened at the red-haired boy

Harry nodded in agreement with his sister, "Best do what your mum and Hal says Ron," Harry stated looking over at Screech slightly.

Fred, George, Ginny and Percy quickly took their seats. Ron was still standing up looking at them all as though they had went mad when Screech hobbled their way, setting a platter of crisp bacon onto the table. He looked up at Ron, his boney hands planted on his hips.

"SCREECH SERVES BREAKFAST! SIT DOWN AND EAT!" Screech bellowed out, making Ron flinch from his shouting.

Ron quickly scramble to his seat hearing Harry and Hally both cackle at him.

"Oh shut up you two," Ron groaned

"Sorry Ron, but we did warn you," Hally giggled at him

"Yeah, but you could have explained it a bit better," Ron mumbled quietly

Screech went around the table, pouring juice into their glasses until he stopped standing between the twins. "Happy Birthday Miss Hally," Screech beamed up at her

"Thank you Screech," Hally grinned while Screech ruffled her hair slightly

He turned to Harry next, "Happy Birthday Master Harry," He beamed up at the raven-haired boy

"Thanks Screech," Harry grinned then tried to duck when his hair got ruffled next. Hally laughed at her brother squirming. "Shut up Hal," Harry grinned giving his little sister a playful nudge.

Everyone looked at the food before him or her, including Ron. "Whoa," He muttered in awe. Screech beamed with pride.

"Eat all you want," Screech urged them all

“Screech, you didn’t clean out their cupboards did you?” Hally asked suddenly

Molly looked over at Hally smiling warmly, “Your father had it all sent here dear. He discussed this with us first just to make sure that no one feels out of place,” Molly explained seeing Hally relax at last

Harry leaned slightly to his sister, “Hal, did you take your medicine?” Harry whispered his question to Hally

“Yes, the nasty stuff,” Hally answered in low key

“Are you feeling all right now?” He pressed

“Yeah, just hate the mood swings that comes first. I hope our mum got a good helping of it then,” Hally ranted quietly

Harry couldn’t help but let out a loud snigger, “What’s so funny Harry?” Ron enquired

“Oh something that Hal just said about our mum Ron, it’s personal,” Harry answered

“Oh,” Ron simply said letting the matter drop before setting his eyes on the huge breakfast feast.

There were waffles, French toast stuffed with fruit or a fruity cream cheese center, hotcakes, eggs least three different kinds to their desire, sausage bangers, crisp bacon, croissants, toast, or biscuits. There were also many kinds of jams, jellies, and Marmalade, whichever they had the desire for.

Both twins each reached for a biscuit, toast, and a croissant before reaching for the orange marmalade at the same time. Molly watched them with amusement.

“Now that is what I like to see, a good healthy appetite,” She commented proudly then turned her attention to her children. “Go on now. It’s perfectly fine,” She replied to them.

“You don’t have to tell me twice mum,” Ron grinned, grabbing a platter and helping himself to the French toast, waffles, and hotcakes.

Screech watched them enjoy the meal, beaming with pride before he started to scrub the pots and pans. Arthur Weasley came in from work minutes later, noticing the feast.

“Morning Weasley’s. Is this a special occasion?” He enquired sitting down at the head of the table.

“Arthur it is the twin’s birthday dear,” Molly announced reminding him of their speaking with Severus Snape at the beginning of the children’s summer holiday.

“Oh so it is, so it is,” Arthur replied deciding on what he wanted to have for breakfast, when he noticed Screech scrubbing away at the kitchen sink.

“Good lord, a houseelf here?” Arthur enquired with interest

“He’s Severus’s houseelf Arthur, he’s here to help with the party,” Molly explained with meaning

“Marvelous creatures they are,” Arthur simply said letting the matter go while helping himself to some eggs, bacon, and toast.

After breakfast, Percy headed back up to his room while the rest headed outdoors into the summer sunshine.

“So what do you two want to do today since it is your birthday?” Ron asked them both

“Quidditch,” Harry answered with a grin

“Swimming,” Hally answered grinning from ear to ear

The two looked at one another quietly. “I want to play Quidditch Hal,” Harry spoke out

“But I want to go swimming Harry. It’s too hot out here to play quidditch,” Hally replied

“Why don’t we do this, Harry can play Quidditch with us while you and Ginny goes swimming?” Ron suggested to them both, not wanting to see the two argue over what they wanted to do

Harry and Hally blinked their eyes at him before grinning. “Sounds good to me Ron. Hal I’ll see you later,” Harry agreed

“Sounds good to me too, see you Harry. Come on Ginny,” Hally replied heading to the swimming hole with the red-haired girl.

The boys were playing Quidditch, having a grand time while at the swimming hole, the girls were squealing in laughter, diving from the highest cliff and plunging into the cool water. The boys finally ended the game, sweat dripping from their faces.

“All in for that swim now?” Ron asked, wiping his forehead

“I’m in,” Fred and George agreed simultaneously

“So am I,” Harry answered next fanning his face with his hand

They headed to the swimming hole in a run to join the girls. The girls were swimming around giggling when they suddenly heard the boys yelling out excitedly, coming their way.

Hally’s eyes went wide as well as Ginny’s, “I thought that they said that they wanted to play Quidditch!” Ginny exclaimed

“They did say that!” Hally yelped out in fear.

Both girls were just about to swim to the edge when the boys showed up,

“LOOK OUT BELOW!” Harry bellowed out diving off of the high cliff and plunging into the cool water.

“Oh gods,” Hally groaned, watching her brother swim under the water towards them.

Ginny quickly swam away just as Harry came up for air twenty feet away from the girls.

“Hey Hal, we decided to swim with you girls after we finished our game,” Harry grinned at his little sister

“Um, that’s very nice Harry now can you keep your distance?” Hally asked wearily

“Now why would I want to do that...Hal! Are you and Ginny um...,”

“Yes we are!” Hally exclaimed with wide eyes, inching away from her big brother slowly until she realized that Fred, George, and Ron heard their conversation.

The boys bursted into sniggers, “It’s all right girls, we won’t mind,” Harry cracked out before bursting into hysterical laughter

“But we do!” Hally exclaimed with wide eyes inching further away from the boys along with Ginny.

They then started to see Hally blush, “Aw Hal is blushing,” Harry teased his twin sister

“Shut up Harry James!” Hally yelled out hearing hoots coming from Fred, George and Ron.

“But Hal, it’s not us that is in a predicament,” Harry cackled out

“OOO! I’m going to get you for that one Harry James,” Hally seethed heading to the waters edge

“Hey, if we wait long enough, maybe we can get a full view,” Ron taunted out

“I’ll tear out your eyes if any of you boys do that! Turn around!” Hally shouted out waiting with Ginny to clamber out of the swimming hole.

Harry gave out a laugh, "Ok Hal, we'll turn around for you," He grinned evilly at her. He nodded at Fred, George and Ron to follow his lead as he turned his back to the girls. They soon followed suit.

Suddenly they heard splashing before they all glanced at the girls slightly grinning from ear to ear. The only thing they caught a glimpse of was their legs and feet as they quickly ran behind a huge shrub.

Minutes later the girls came out from behind the shrub in their swimming suits, heading back into the water.

"Feel better Hal?" Harry asked with an evil grin on his face

"You rotten brother! I know you all was trying to spy on me and Ginny," Hally growled

"Hey we tried Hal, but we didn't see anything, except your feet. You two ran like a streak of lightening," Harry sniggered

Hally grabbed her brothers head, dunking him under the water playfully,

"Oh She got me!" Harry feigned out an agonizing groan hearing the others burst into laughter

"That wasn't very nice Harry," Hally commented

"Hey I was just kidding around with you Hal, anyway I wouldn't let anyone get the chance to see you like that...have you done that often?" Harry asked her quietly

"Um...since I was ten but this was um Ginny's first time," Hally whispered

"Oh. I didn't know Hal, but we won't say anything to anyone else about it," Harry promised

"Speak for yourself Harry. I wanted to see what she looked like," Ron blurted out

Both twins turned his way giving him glares, "GULP!" "I won't say a word, sorry about that," Ron replied while his twin brothers sniggered at him.

LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Streamers aligned from the branches of several trees that stood within the Weasley's property at the edge of the huge clearing behind the small house. A big tent had been erected in the center of the clearing with a long grand table to hold the food for the party. Many tables and chairs were scattered about for the invited guests who would soon arrive. The six children stood at the side lines inside the tent, taking everything in.

"I wonder if Hermione is going to come," Hally commented thoughtfully

"She said that she would Hal, don't worry," Harry stated with a grin

They both missed their brown-bushy-haired friend since the beginning of their summer holiday and wanted to know what she has been doing. Ron rolled his eyes over hearing Hermione's name. He pulled out a letter that he had gotten earlier that morning.

"Here you two, it had your names on it as well," Ron told them handing the letter over to Harry.

Hally leaned close to Harry as Ron read the letter out loud for them both...

"Dear Ron, Harry and Hally if you're there already,

"I hope everything went all right and that Harry and Hally is okay and that you didn't do anything to get into trouble, Ron, because that would get Harry and Hally into deep trouble with their father. I've been doing all right myself and missed them both very much, will you please let me know at once, but perhaps it would better if you used a different owl, because I think another delivery might finish your one off.

"I'm very busy with schoolwork of course'--How can she be?" Said Ron in horror. "We're on vacation!--'And we're going to London next Wednesday to buy new books. Why don't we meet in Diagon Alley coming to your home for Harry's and Hally's birthday party of course?"

"Let me know what's happening as soon as you can. Love from Hermione."

"Well, that fits in nicely, we can go and get all your things then, too," said Mrs. Weasley coming into the tent and hearing Hermione's letter being read by Ron. She started to spread table cloths over the long banquet table. "What did you all do today while you were outside?" she enquired

Hally quickly looked away from the woman, hearing her brother Harry snigger with Fred, George, and Ron.

"We went swimming with the girls after we played Quidditch," Harry answered leaving out the full details

"I'm sure that you boys stayed out of sight with those brooms so that no one down in the village could see you?" Molly questioned her three sons.

"We made sure mum," Fred, George, and Ron assured her with grins on their faces

They asked Percy after the girls had left for the swimming hole to join them, but as usual he declined. The twins only seen Percy during mealtimes so far; he stayed shut in his room the rest of the times.

Percy came into the tent minutes later. "Wish I knew what he was up to," Said Fred, frowning. He's not himself. His exam results came the day before you two did; twelve O.W.L.s and he hardly gloated at all."

"Ordinary Wizarding Levels," Said George explained to Harry, who gave Fred a puzzled look. "Bill got twelve, too. If we're not careful, we'll have another Head Boy in the family. I don't think I could stand the shame."

Hally bursted into fitful of giggles after heaing that.

Bill was the oldest Weasley brother. He and the next brother, Charlie (Two of Hally's favorites), had already left Hogwarts. Harry had never met Bill, but had met Charlie only briefly, knowing that Charlie was in Romania studying dragons and Bill in Egypt working for the wizard's bank, Gringotts.

"Dunno how Mum and Dad are going to afford all our school stuff this year," said George after a while. "Five sets of lockhart books! And Ginny needs robes and a wand and everything..."

Harry and Hally said nothing. They felt a bit awkward. Stored in an underground vault at Gringotts in London was a small fortune that their parents had left them both.

Soon their Gryffindor friends started to arrive right on time as well as several from Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw who were not at the first Birthday party at Snape Manor. Games were played while the parents chaperoned, except that there were different types of games then the ones that were played at the first birthday party. Hally had to explain some of the games to Harry on how they were played, he watched several take turns until he got them down in his mind, playing along with them.

The food appeared on the long banquet table by Screech and Molly both, who actually had gotten used to the other ones presence. Everyone murmured appreciatively over the feast before them taking in their fill. When the last of their guests had finally left, Harry and Hally both lended a hand in the clean up along with Fred, George, Ron and Ginny.

Ginny and Hally tackled what was left of the food by removing the silverware and cutlery before Screech made it disappear in front of their very eyes.

"I actually liked this party as much as the first one," Ron commented suddenly

"Yeah, but the only thing that was different was the games," Hally replied quietly

"There is a reason for that. No Gryffindor wants to play Slytherin games," Fred and George complied

Hally raised her eyes at them, "But you four did," she pointed out

Fred, George, and Ron shifted thier feet. "Yeah, but we're used to playing those games with you Lady Hex, Ron I think was talked into it by your brother Lord Hex," Fred and George explained

Hally looked over at Ron with her eyebrows up. Ron tried his best to avoid eye contact with Hally until he blew out an exasperated sigh.

"Bloody hell, yes Harry talked me into playing those games Hally, are you happy now that you got the truth from me?" Ron asked while slapping his hands against his sides.

"Mmm...yes," Hally answered with a smile on her face

Percy who still hung around after the party, looked out in the distance, nodding his head.

"Some Slytherins do not live too far from here though," He informed the twins, getting their attention swiftly. "I'm surprised that they haven't tried to sabotage your birthday party," He added

"Who is they Percy?" Hally enquired while looking out in the distance

"The Crabbe's and The Goyles, although I heard that Malfoy was supposed to be staying with one them at their homes," Percy answered her

Hally turned his way, "But isn't that just on the other side of the huge swimming hole?" Hally asked getting a bad feeling over the situation.

"Yes it is, the place is split between our properties, giving us the better half of the area, They've been trying to shirk our father into selling it to them for the past few years," Percy answered

Hally looked over at Ginny suddenly. Their eyes went wide over hearing that bit of news. Harry raised his head up toward them after listening to Percy,

"Hal, did you hear anything strange before we got there at the swimming hole earlier today?" Harry questioned his twin sister

Hally shook her head, "No Harry we didn't, we were laughing out too loud to hear anything," Hally answered him truthfully

"Clink" "Fred, George, how do you get onto their property?" Harry enquired suddenly, getting angrier by the second.

Fred and George both studied him for a moment, "Why? Whatever for Lord Hex?" They asked him at one time

"Let's just say that I have a feeling that our sister's were being spied on before we got to the swimming hole," Harry stated, noticing the look on his little sister's face

That was all that needed to be said as all four Weasley boys started hiking up the trail,

"Follow us Harry," Fred and George called out over their shoulders

Harry followed the other boys with Hally and Ginny following him in tow.

They headed up the trail that led to the swimming hole area, however instead of going straight on, they turned onto a narrow path that went around the swimming area. They continued walking until Percy who was in the lead stopped in his tracks, waiting for the rest. Percy pointed ahead of them after they met up with him.

"Over there is the Goyles home, and you guessed it that is the Crabbe's home," Percy informed the twins

Harry peered at the two large similar manors along with Hally. "Man do they ever share the same brain or what" Harry commented

Hally squinted her eyes when she noticed movement on the grounds. Sure enough there was Crabbe, Goyle and Malfoy lingering about on the lawn.

"Harry, there's that no good Slytherin Prince with his goons right now," Hally bursted out pointing

Harry's eyes followed to where his sister was pointing to. His eyes landed on the three boys heading their way suddenly. "Get your wands out just in case," Harry whispered to the others while Hally had the look of hatred upon her face and Ginny was steered out of the way by Ron, who was just as angry over the news along with Harry.

Draco Malfoy stood in the front after stopping in front of the twins and the Weasley's.

"Well, well, well. Looks like we've been invaded by a bunch of Weasels..." He looked Hally's way suddenly seeing her present. A smirk slowly appeared upon his face.

"Little Potter, you grew up a bit there earlier this summer didn't you?" He smirked at Hally

Hally let out a growl while Ginny gasped in shock. Harry stood in Draco's face within a second flat.

"What's the matter Potter? Don't like anyone looking at your sister there? Heh, too late for that isn't it..." Draco raised his hands up in the air after Harry shoved his wand up to the platinum-blond-boy's neck.

"If you so much as go near my sister Malfoy, you will regret it," Harry warned him

"That won't be a problem Potter, I can't stand her anyway," Draco told him in a gulp

"Wise choice Malfoy. That goes for Ginny as well," Harry hissed his warning

"Not interested in little Weasley's Potter," Draco sputtered his words while noticing deathly glares coming from Percy, Fred, George, and Ron.

Harry slowly put his wand down from Draco's neck, "By the way, stay on your side of the swimming hole! All of you, because the next time well...we won't be held responsible for what happens to two goons along with their leader here," Harry grinned evilly at the three

"Yeah? Well you and those Weasley's better stay on your side as well Potter," Draco sneered

"Oh that won't be a problem Malfoy, considering they have the better side," Harry spat out before they started heading back from where they came. Hally glared at Draco for at least three seconds before following Ginny and the others back.

Draco watched her follow the others, "By the way little Potter, Diggory is a very lucky guy having you," He smirked

Hally whirled around at him getting ready to take the boy down getting stopped by her brother. "I'll rip you apart Malfoy!" She shouted while Draco crossed his arms at her grinning evilly

"Let him go Hal! He isn't worth the effort, wait until school," Harry told her getting her to stop struggling

"I can hardly wait," Hally replied seeing Crabbe and Goyle go pale in the face.

"See you later Potters, much later," Draco sneered at the two before walking away from them.

The twins headed back with the Weasley's after watching Draco walk away from them. Draco looked back over his shoulder, watching the two look alike disappear from their sight.

"Told you we'd get found out," Crabbe and Goyle mumbled at once

"Shut up you two," Draco ordered them keeping his eyes on the path just in case the Potters were to do a sneak attack with the Weasley's.

Meanwhile the twins, and the Weasley clan headed back to the tent, noticing that everything was cleared out and Molly was standing there waiting for them.

"Your father left the tent here just in case you two wished to camp out under the stars sometime," Molly informed them

"Oh wicked!" Hally exclaimed excitedly

"Cool!" Harry cried out grinning from ear to ear

"Everything is here, from sleeping bags on down to lanterns for everyone here, Dinner will be a bit late this evening, but i'll see everyone in a couple of hours," Molly smiled at them before heading up to the small house.

"Wicked! A camp out!" Harry and Hally grinned scrambling for a sleeping bag

Ron watched the two shaking his head, "You two would! There's bugs out here! Flies, mosquitos, spiders, and snakes," He commented, then winced hearing Hally squeal

"Wicked, then we'll be comfortable Ron," she grinned at him

"What...?" "Hal is just teasing you Ron, however she isn't afraid of snakes. I've seen her pick them up at home," Harry grinned

"Oh gross! They're scaley, cold blooded creatures! How can you like them Hally?" Ron asked

Hally shrugged her shoulders, "Dunno, I like you...sort of," she simply said

Harry let out a snigger, "Oh...Hey!" Ron cried out after catching on to what Hally just said to him

"What?" Hally asked the red-haired boy with the look of innocence

"You...never mind. I'm sleeping in the house. You can stay out here if you like," Ron stated, then noticed his twin brothers and Ginny grabbing a sleeping bag next. Percy declined the offer, however, making his way up to the house

"Well if that's what you want Ron, then it's fine with us," Harry told him with a shrug

"Yeah, which means more quiet for us," Hally teased at Ron

"What does that supposed to mean?" Ron asked her

"Ron, you snore loudly, we can hear it in Ginny's room at night," Hally explained to him

"I do not snore...," "Yes you do Ron," Harry intervened truthfully

"All right fine, I snore okay? But I'm still not...what are those things?" Ron suddenly asked the twins

Hally looked at him funny until noticing what he was seeing, "Oh, Harry showed me those in our first year at dad's quarters Ron, we make them ourselves, they're called smores," Hally grinned while Harry pulled out a big bag of marshmallows, several bars of chocolate, and a box of graham crackers.

Ron suddenly lost interest in sleeping inside the house, grabbing the extra sleeping bag that was left from the pile. "Thought you wanted to stay in the house Ron?" Harry asked him grinning

"To heck with the house, I want to try those smores! Seamus told me about those things last year," Ron grinned hearing laughter erupt from the other five.

That night in the clearing an orange glow was seen at a distance finding six children around a camp fire roasting marshmallows for smores, telling ghostly tales, and having a grand ol' time.

LAST WEEK OF SUMMER HOLIDAY

Mrs. Weasley woke everyone up early one Wednesday morning. After a quick half a dozen of bacon sandwiches each and making the twins so stuffed that they thought that they would explode, they pulled on their coats and Mrs. Weasley took a flowerpot off the kitchen mantelpiece and peered inside.

"We're running low, Arthur," she sighed. "We'll have to buy more today...Ah well, guests first! After you Harry dear!"

And she offered him the flowerpot.

Harry stared at them all watching him. Hally suddenly stood beside her big brother.

"W-what am I supposed to do?" he stammered

"Mrs. Weasley, Harry has never done this before. We always used a portkey instead," Hally explained to them.

Ron slapped his forehead, "He's never traveled by floo powder," he said remembering suddenly. "Sorry Harry, I forgot to tell mum about that."

"Never?" Said Mr. Weasley. "But how did you get to Diagon Alley before Severus adopted you Harry?"

"I went on the Underground--"

"Really?" Said Arthur eagerly. "Were there escapators? How exactly--"

"Not now Arthur," Said Molly. "Floo powder's a lot quicker, dear, but goodness me, if you've never used it before--"

"He'll be all right mum," Said Fred. "Harry watch us first."

He took a pinch of glittering powder out of the flowerpot, stepped up to the fire, and threw the powder into the flames.

With a roar, the fire turned emerald green and rose higher than Fred, who stepped right into it, shouting, "Diagon Alley!" and vanished

"You must speak clearly, dear," Molly told Harry as George dipped his hand into the flowerpot. "And be sure to get out at the right gate..."

"The right what?" Harry asked with wide eyes

Hally stepped in just then, "I'll go with you Harry...that is if that's all right with you Mrs. Weasley?" Hally asked as the fire roared and whipped George out of sight, too.

"That is an excellent idea Hally dear," Molly agreed with a smile. "But there are an awful lot of wizard fires to choose from, you know, but as long as one of you two speak it clearly--"

"They'll be fine, Molly, don't fuss," said Arthur Weasley, helping himself to Floo powder too.

"But dear, if they get lost, how would we explain it to their father?"

"I know what gate to go to Mrs. Weasley," Hally assured the woman

"Well...all right...you two go after Arthur," Molly told them. "Now when you get into the fire, say where you're going--"

"And keep your elbows tucked in," Ron advised

"And your eyes shut," Molly said. "The soot--"

"Don't fidget," said Ron. "Or you might well fall out of the wrong fireplace--"

"But don't panic and get out too early; wait until you see Fred and George."

Trying hard to bear all this in mind, Harry took a pinch of Floo powder and walked to the edge of the fire with his sister Hally who took a hold of his right hand. He took a breath, scattered the powder into the

flames, and stepped forward with his sister by his side; the fire felt like a warm breeze; Harry opened his mouth and immediately swallowed a lot of hot ash.

"D-Dia-gon Alley," he coughed. Hally looked at her brother with wide eyes

"Harry No!" She cried out, however it was too late. They were on their way to an unknown destination.

It felt as though they was being sucked down a giant drain. They seem to be spinning very fast--the roaring in their ears was deafening--they tried to keep their eyes open but the whirl of green flames made them feel sick--something hard knocked their elbows and they tucked them in tightly, still spinning and spinning--now it felt as though cold hands were slapping their faces--squinting through his glasses, Harry saw a blurred stream of fireplaces and snatched glimpses of the rooms beyond--his bacon sandwiches were churning inside him--he closed his eyes again wishing it would stop, and then--

They both fell, face forward, onto cold stone and Harry felt the bridge of his glasses snap.

A/N: That is all for chapter 14 see you in chapter 15 bye for now.

Chapter 15

They fell, face forward, onto cold stone and Harry felt the bridge of his glasses snap...

Dizzy and bruised, covered in soot, the twins got gingerly to their feet, Harry holding his broken glasses up to his eyes and Hally looking at him with sympathy clearly written on her face. They were quite alone, but where they was, they had no idea. All they could tell was that they was standing in the stone fireplace of what looked like a large, dimly lit wizard's shop—but nothing in here was ever likely to be on a Hogwarts school list.

A glass case nearby held a withered hand on a cushion, a bloodstained pack of cards, and a staring glass eye. Evil-looking masks stared down from the walls at them, an assortment of human bones lay upon the counter, and rusty, spiked instruments hung from the ceiling. Even worse, the dark, narrow street the twins could see through the dusty shop window was definitely not Diagon Alley.

The sooner they got out of there, the better. Noses still stinging where they had hit the hearth, Harry and Hally both made their way swiftly and silently toward the door, but before they got halfway toward it, two people appeared on the other side of the glass—and one of them was the very last person the twins wanted to meet when they were lost, covered in soot, Harry wearing broken glasses: Draco Malfoy.

Harry looked quickly around and spotted a large black cabinet to his left; Hally had her eyes kept on the window when Harry suddenly grabbed her by the arm and pulled her along with him inside the cabinet and pulled the doors closed, leaving a small crack to peer through for them. Seconds later, a bell clanged, and Malfoy stepped into the shop.

"Harry, what are you doing hiding from Malfoy of all people...,"

"Hush Hal, just didn't feel like having any confrontation with him today, especially how we look at the moment," Harry whispered making her see his meaning

“Good point big brother,” Hally whispered at last before quieting down and peering out through the small crack with her brother.

The man who followed Malfoy into the shop was no other than Lucius Malfoy, Draco’s father. He held the same pale, pointed face and identical cold silver-grey eyes. Mr. Malfoy crossed the shop, looking lazily at the items on display, and rang a bell on the counter before turning to his son and saying, “Touch nothing, Draco.”

Malfoy, who had reached for the glass eye, said, “I thought you were going to buy me a present.”

“I said I would buy you a racing broom,” Said his father, drumming his fingers on the counter.

“What’s the good of that if I’m not on the House team?” Said Malfoy, looking sulky and bad-tempered. “The Potters got a Nimbus Two Thousand last year. Special permission from Dumbledore so they could play for Gryffindor. They’re not even that good, it’s just because they’re famous...famous for having a stupid scar on their foreheads...”

Malfoy bent down to examine a shelf full of skulls.

“...everyone thinks that they are so smart, wonderful Potters with their scars and their broomsticks...”

Hally let out a low growl of anger while Harry kept a hold of her so that they were not caught for spying on the two Malfoy’s.

“You have told me this at least a dozen times already,” Said Mr. Malfoy, with a quelling look at his son. “And I would remind you that it is not—prudent—to appear less than fond of the Potters, not when most of our kind regard him as the hero who made the Dark Lord disappear—ah, Mr. Borgin.”

A stooping man had appeared behind the counter, smoothing his greasy hair back from his face.

“Mr. Malfoy, what a pleasure to see you again,” said Mr. Borgin in a voice as oily as his hair. “Delighted—and young Master Malfoy, too—charmed. How may I be of assistance? I must show you, just in today, and very reasonably priced...”

“I’m not buying today, Mr. Borgin, but selling,” Said Mr. Malfoy.

“Selling?” The smile faded slightly from Mr. Borgin’s face.

“You have heard, of course, that the Ministry is conducting more raids,” Said Mr. Malfoy, taking a roll of parchment from his inside pocket and unraveling it for Mr. Borgin to read. “I have a few—ah—items at home that might embarrass me, if the Ministry were to call...”

“Raids?” Harry whispered the question looking at his twin

“That no good jerk is selling whatever he’s got Harry in order to keep the Ministry off of his back,” Hally whispered her answer to him

Mr. Borgin fixed a pair of pince-nez to his nose and looked down the list.

“The Ministry wouldn’t presume to trouble you, sir, surely?”

Lucius Malfoy’s lip curled.

“I have not been visited yet. The name Malfoy still commands a certain respect, yet the Ministry grows ever more meddlesome. There are rumors about a Muggle Protection Act—no doubt that flea-bitten, Muggle-loving fool Arthur Weasley is behind it...”

Both twins felt a hot surge of anger.

“—and as you see, certain of these poisons might make it appear...”

“I understand, sir, of course,” Said Mr. Borgin. “Let me see...”

“Can I Have that?” Interrupted Draco, pointing at the withered hand on its cushion.

“Ah, the Hand of Glory!” Said Mr. Borgin, abandoning Mr. Malfoy’s list and scurrying over to Draco. “Insert a candle and it gives light only to the holder! Best friend of thieves and plunderers! Your son has fine taste sir.”

“I hope my son will amount to more than a thief or a plunderer, Borgin,” Said Mr. Malfoy coldly, and Mr. Borgin said quickly, “No offense, sir, no offense meant...”

“Though if his grades don’t pick up anymore than what they are,” said Mr. Malfoy, more coldly still, “That may indeed be all his is fit for...,”

“It’s not my fault,” Retorted Draco. “The teachers all have favorites, those Potters, and that Hermione Granger...,”

“I would have thought you’d be ashamed that a girl of no wizard family beat you in every exam,” Snapped Mr. Malfoy

“Ha!” Said the twins under their breath, pleased to see Draco looking both abashed and angry.

“It’s the same all over,” said Mr. Borgin, in his oily voice. “Wizard blood is counting for less everywhere...”

“Not with me,” Mr. Malfoy said, his nostrils flaring.

“No, sir, nor with me, sir,” Said Mr. Borgin, with a deep bow.

“In that case, perhaps we can return to my list,” said Mr. Malfoy shortly. “I am in something of a hurry, Borgin, I have important business elsewhere today...”

They started to haggle. The twins watched nervously as Draco drew nearer and nearer to their hiding place, examining the objects for sale. Draco paused to examine a long coil of hangman’s rope and to read, smirking, the card propped on a magnificent necklace of opals, Caution: Do not touch, cursed—Has Claimed the Lives of Nineteen Muggle Owners to Date.

Draco turned away and saw the cabinet right in front of him. He walked forward—he stretched out his hand for the handle—

“Done,” said Mr. Malfoy at the counter. “Come Draco...”

Both twins wiped their foreheads on their sleeves as Draco turned away.

“Good day to you, Mr. Borgin. I’ll expect you at the manor tomorrow to pick up the goods.”

The moment the door had closed, Mr. Borgin dropped his oily manner.

“Good day yourself, Mister Malfoy, and if the stories are true, you haven’t sold me half of what’s hidden in your manor...”

Muttering darkly, Mr. Borgin disappeared into a back room. The twins waited for a minute in case he came back, then, quietly as they could, slipped out of the cabinet, past the glass case, and out of the shop door.

“Phew, that was close,” Hally muttered in relief

Clutching his broken glasses to his face, Harry stared around. They had emerged into a dingy alleyway that seemed to be made up entirely of shops devoted to the Dark Arts. The one they had just left, Borgin and Burkes, looked like the largest, but opposite was a nasty window display of shrunken heads and, two shabby-looking wizards were watching them from the shadow of a doorway, muttering to each other. Feeling jumpy, the twins set off with Harry trying to hold his glasses straight and hoping against hope they’d be able to find a way out of here.

An old wooden street sign hanging over a shop selling poisonous candles told them that they were in Knockturn Alley. This didn’t help as Harry never heard of such a place, however Hally had. Harry supposed that he hadn’t spoken clearly enough through his mouthful of ashes back in the Weasley’s fire. Trying to stay calm, they both wondered what to do.

“Not lost are you dearies?” Said a voice from behind, making Harry and Hally both jump.

An aged witch stood in front of him, holding a tray of what looked horribly like human fingernails. She leered at them, showing mossy teeth. Harry took hold of his little sister, backing them away from the witch.

“We’re fine thanks,” Harry said. “We’re just...”

“HARRY! HALLY! What d’yeh doin’ down there?”

The twin’s hearts leapt. So did the witch; a load of fingernails cascaded down over her feet and she cursed as the massive form of Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper, came striding toward them, beetle-black eyes flashing over his bristling beard.

“Hagrid!” Harry croaked in relief. “We got lost—Floo Powder...”

Hagrid seized the twins by the scruff of their necks and pulled them away from the witch, knocking the tray right out of her hands. Her shrieks followed them all the way along the twisting alleyway out into bright sunlight, Harry and Hally noticed a familiar snow-white marble building in the distance—Gringotts Bank. Hagrid had steered them right into Diagon Alley.

“Yer both a mess!” Said Hagrid gruffly, brushing soot off Harry so forcefully he nearly knocked him into a barrel of dragon dung outside an Apothecary. He started to brush Hally off next, only he knocked her into a huge cauldron full of saplings.

“Skulkin’ around Knockturn Alley, I dunno—dodgy place you two—don’ want no one ter see yeh down there....,”

“We realized that,” Said Harry, ducking as Hagrid made to brush him off again while Hally tried her best to get out of the huge cauldron full of saplings. “I told you —we was lost—what were you doing down there, anyway?”

“Yeah! What were you doing down there Hagrid?” Hally questioned as well after finally climbing out of the cauldron.

“I was lookin’ fer a Flesh-Eatin’ slug repellent,” Growled Hagrid. “They’re ruinin’ the school cabbages. Yer not on yer own?”

“We’re staying with the Weasley’s but we got separated,” Harry explained. “We’ve got to go and find them...”

“Eww! Let the slugs have the school cabbages,” Hally ranted, her mind still on the Flesh-eating slug repellent.

They set off together down the street.

“How come yeh two never wrote back to me?” said Hagrid as Harry and Hally jogged alongside him (they had to take three steps to every stride of Hagrid’s enormous boots). The twins explained all about Dobby and their father.

“Rogue houseelves,” Growled Hagrid. “If I’d’ve known...”

“Harry! Hally! Over here!”

The twins looked up and saw Hermione Granger standing at the top of the white flight of steps to Gringotts. She ran down to meet them, her bushy brown hair flying behind her.

“What happened to your glasses Harry? Hello Hagrid—Oh, it’s wonderful to see you again—Are you two coming into Gringotts,”

Hally stifled her giggling over hearing Hermione Granger rant at them.

“As soon as we find the Weasley’s Hermione,” Harry answered her grinning

“Yeh two won’t have long ter wait,” Hagrid said with a grin.

Harry, Hally, and Hermione looked around: Sprinting up the crowded street was Ron, Fred, George, Percy, and Mr. Weasley.

“Harry, Hally,” Mr. Weasley panted. “We hoped you’d only gone one grate too far...,” he mopped his glistening bald patch. “Molly’s frantic—she’s coming now...,”

“Where did you two come out?” Ron asked

“Knockturn Alley,” Said Hagrid grimly

“Excellent!” Said Fred and George together.

“We’ve never been allowed in,” Ron said enviously.

“I should ruddy well think not,” Growled Hagrid.

Mrs. Weasley now came galloping into view, her handbag swinging wildly in one hand, Ginny just clinging onto the other.

“Oh, Harry, Hally—oh, my dears—you two could have been anywhere...,”

Gasping for breath she pulled a large clothes brush out of her bag and began sweeping off the soot Hagrid had not managed to beat away. Mr. Weasley took Harry’s glasses, gave them a tap of his wand, and returned them, good as new.

“Well, gotta be off,” Hagrid announced, who was having his hand wrung by Mrs. Weasley (“Knockturn Alley! If you hadn’t found him, Hagrid!). “See yer two at Hogwarts!” And he strode away, head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the packed street.

“Guess who we seen in Borgin and Burkes?” Harry and Hally both asked Ron and Hermione as they climbed the Gringotts steps. “Malfoy and his father.”

“Did Lucius Malfoy buy anything?” Mr. Weasley asked sharply behind them

“No, he was selling...,”

“So he’s worried,” Said Mr. Weasley with grim satisfaction. “Oh, I’d love to get Lucius Malfoy for something...”

“You be careful Arthur,” Mrs. Weasley said sharply as they were bowed into the bank by a goblin at the door. “That family’s trouble. Don’t go biting off more than you can chew...”

“So you don’t think I’m a match for Lucius Malfoy?” Mr. Weasley asked indignantly, but he was distracted almost at once by the sight of Hermione’s parents, who were standing nervously at the counter that ran all along the great marble hall, waiting for Hermione to introduce them.

“But you’re muggles!” said Mr. Weasley delightedly. “We must have a drink! What’s that you’ve got there? Oh, you’re changing Muggle money, Molly look!” He pointed excitedly at the ten-pound notes in Mr. Granger’s hand.

“Meet you back here,” Ron said to Hermione as the Weasley’s, Harry and Hally were led off to their underground vaults by another Gringotts goblin.

The vaults were reached by means of small, goblin-driven carts that sped along miniature train tracks through the bank’s underground tunnels. Harry and Hally enjoyed the breakneck journey down to the Weasley’s vault, but felt dreadful, far worse than they had in Knockturn Alley, when it was opened. There was a very small pile of silver sickles inside, and just one gold Galleon. Mrs. Weasley felt right into the corners before sweeping the whole lot into her bag. The twins felt even worse when they reached their vault. They tried to block the contents from view as they each hastily shoved handfuls of coins into their leather bags.

Back outside on the marble steps, they all separated. Percy muttered vaguely about needing a new quill. Fred and George had spotted their friend from school, Lee Jordan. Mrs. Weasley and Ginny were going to a secondhand robe shop. Mr. Weasley was insisting on taking the Grangers off to the Leaky Cauldron for a drink.

"We'll all meet at Flourish and Blotts in an hour to buy your schoolbooks," Said Mrs. Weasley, setting off with Ginny. "That's where we'll be meeting up with your father you two...And not one step down Knockturn Alley!" she shouted at her twins' retreating backs after giving Harry and Hally a reminder.

Harry, Hally, Ron, and Hermione strolled off along the winding, cobbled street. The bags of gold, silver, and bronze jangling cheerfully inside of the twins' pockets was clamoring to be spent, so they bought four large strawberry-and-peanut-butter ice creams, which they slurped happily as they wandered up the alley, examining the fascinating shop windows. Ron gazed longingly at a full set of Chudley Cannon robes in the windows of Quality Quidditch Supplies until Hermione dragged them off to buy ink and parchment next door. In Gambol and Japes Wizarding Joke Shop, they Fred, George, and Lee Jordan, who were stocking up on Dr. Filibuster's Fabulous Wet-Start, No-Heat Fireworks, and in a tiny junk shop full of broken wands, lopsided brass scales, and old cloaks covered in potion boring book called (Prefects who gained power).

"A study of Hogwarts Prefects and their later careers," Ron read aloud off the back cover. "That sounds fascinating..."

"Go away," Percy snapped.

" 'Course, he's very ambitious, Percy, he's got it all planned out...He wants to be Minister of Magic..." Ron told Harry, Hally, and Hermione in an undertone as they left Percy to it.

An hour later, they headed for Flourish and Blotts. They were by no means the only ones making their way to the bookshop. As they approached it, they saw to their surprise a large crowd jostling outside the doors, trying to get in. The reason for this was proclaimed by a large banner stretched across the upper windows:

GILDEROY LOCKHART

Will be signing copies of his autobiography

MAGICAL ME

Today 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

"Oh gods not him!" Hally exclaimed with the look of disdain written on her face

"We can actually meet him!" Hermione squealed. "I mean, he's written almost the whole booklist!"

Hally turned to look at her, "Speak for yourself 'mione! I can't stand the jerk," Hally replied with wide eyes. Harry and Ron could only snigger at her comment.

The crowd seemed to be made up mostly of witches around Mrs. Weasley's age. A harrassed-looking wizard stood at the door, saying "Calmly, please, ladies...Don't push, there...mind the books, now..."

Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione squeezed inside. A long line wound right to the back of the shop, where Gilderoy Lockhart was signing his books. They each grabbed a copy of The standard Book of Spells, Grade 2 and sneaked up the line to where the rest of the Weasleys were standing with Mr. and Mrs. Granger, and Severus Snape who was looking at the twins with his arms crossed.

"Hey dad," Harry and Hally grinned at their father sheepishly

"Mmmhmm...Next time speak a bit more clearer when taking the Floo network Connor," Severus replied

Molly turned her attention to the four after hearing Severus speak out.

"Oh, there you all are, good," Said Mrs. Weasley. She sounded breathless and kept patting her hair. "We'll be able to see him in a minute..."

Hally tilted her head slightly at Molly before turning around and making silent gags from her view. Severus, who noticed kept a stone face shown. Hally looked up at him a second later, her eyes pleading

"I am sorry Raven, but you have to endure this just like the rest of us," Severus told her

Hally blew out a sigh of defeat, "Yes sir," she simply said with a scowl on her face

Gilderoy Lockhart came slowly into view, seated at a table surrounded by large pictures of his own face, all winking and flashing dazzlingly white teeth at the crowd (Which made Hally sick to her stomach just by seeing it). The real Lockhart was wearing robes of forget-me-not blue that exactly matched his eyes; his pointed wizard's hat was set at a jaunty angle on his wavy hair.

A short, irritable-looking man was dancing around tanking photographs with a large black camera that emitted puffs of purple smoke with every blinding flash.

"Out of the way, there," He snarled at Ron, moving back to get a better shot. "This is for the Daily Prophet..."

"Big deal," Said Ron, rubbing his foot where the photographer had stepped on it.

Gilderoy Lockhart heard him. He looked up. He saw Ron--and then he saw Harry and Hally both. He stared. Then he leapt to his feet and positively shouted, "It can't be Harry and Hally Potter?"

Hally let out a groan, "Great! Thanks alot Ron," she muttered trying her best to hide behind Severus's back along with Harry who did not want to be the center of attention either.

The crowd parted, whispering excitedly; Lockhart dived forward, seized the twins by their arms, and pulled them to the front. The crowd burst into applause. Harry's and Hally's faces burned as Lockhart shook their hands one at a time for the photographer, who was clicking away madly, wafting thick smoke over Severus and the Weasleys.

"Nice big smile Harry, Hally," said Lockhart, through his own gleaming teeth. "Together, we are worth the front page."

"Not bloody likely," Hally blurted out, but was completely ignored by Lockhart.

When he finally let go of their hands, Harry and Hally could hardly feel their fingers. They tried to sidle back over to Severus and the Weasleys, but Lockhart threw his arms around their shoulders and clamped them tightly to his sides.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said loudly, waving for quiet. "What an extraordinary moment this is! The perfect moment for me to make a little announcement I've been sitting on for some time!

"When young Harry and Hally here stepped into Flourish and Blotts today, they only wanted to buy my autobiography --which I shall be happy to present them now, free of charge.." The crowd applauded again. "They had no idea," Lockhart continued, giving Harry and Hally a little shake that made Harry's glasses slip to the end of his nose, "That they would shortly be getting much, much more than my book, Magical Me. Yes ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure and pride in announcing that this September, I will be taking up the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!"

The crowd cheered and clapped and the twins found themselves being presented with the entire works of Gilderoy Lockhart. Staggering slightly to the edge of the room, where Ginny and Ron was standing next to Ginny's new cauldron.

"You have these," They told Ron and Ginny in a mumble, tipping the books into the cauldron, "We'll buy our own..."

"Bet you loved that didn't you Potters," said a voice the twins had no trouble recognizing. They both straightened up and found themselves face-to-face with Draco Malfoy, who was wearing his usual sneer.

"Famous Harry and Hally Potter," Said Malfoy, "Can't even go into a bookshop without making the front page."

"Leave Harry and Hally alone, they didn't want all that!" Ginny said. It was the first time she had lashed out in front of the twins. She was glaring at Malfoy.

Draco turned his eyes back to Harry, "Potter, you've got yourself a girlfriend!" Drawled Draco, Ginny went scarlet as well as Ron while Hermione fought her way over, also clutching stacks of Lockhart's books.

"Oh, it's you," said Hermione while Ron looked at Malfoy as if he was something unpleasant on the sole of his shoe.

"Bet you're surprised to see Harry and Hally here, eh?" Ron questioned Draco

"Not as surprised as I am to see you in a shop, Weasley," Draco retorted. "I suppose your parents will go hungry for a month to pay for all those."

Ron went a deeper red than the last time. He dropped his books into the cauldron, too, and started toward Malfoy, but Harry, Hally, and Hermione grabbed the back of his jacket.

"Ron!" Said Mr. Weasley, struggling over with Fred and George. "What are you doing? It's too crowded in here, let's go outside."

"Well, well, well--Arthur Weasley."

It was Lucius Malfoy. He stood with his hand on Draco's shoulder, sneering in just the same manner.

"Lucius," Said Arthur, nodding coldly.

"Busy time at the Ministry, I hear," Lucius said. "All those raids...I hope they're paying you overtime?"

He reached into Ginny's cauldron and extracted, from amid the glossy Lockhart books, a very old, very battered copy of a Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration.

"Obviously not," Lucius stated. "Dear me, what's the use of being a disgrace to the name of wizard if they don't even pay you well for it?"

Arthur flushed darker than either Ron or Ginny.

"We have different idea of what disgraces the name of wizard, Malfoy," He said

Both twins kept their grins from view, watching the spectacle forming before their very eyes.

"Clearly," said Lucius, his pale eyes straying to Mr. and Mrs. Granger, who were watching apprehensively. "The company you keep, Weasley...and I thought your family could sink no lower..."

There was a thud of metal as Ginny's cauldron went flying; Arthur had thrown himself at Lucius Malfoy, knocking him backward into a bookshelf. Dozens of heavy spellbooks came thundering down on all their heads, there was a yell of "Get him Dad!" from Fred and George; Molly Weasley was shrieking, "No Arthur, no!"; the crowd stampeded backward, knocking more shelves over;

"Gentlemen, please--please!" cried the assistant, and then, louder than all..."

"Break it up, there, gents, break it up..."

Hagrid was wading toward them through the sea of books, Severus not far behind him. Severus took one look at the commotion and then strayed his eyes onto his adopted twins...there they were; their hands clinched into fists and punching air slightly, both wearing evil grins on their faces. Severus arched an eyebrow up at the two while Hagrid, in one swift instant, pulled Arthur Weasley and Lucius Malfoy apart.

Arthur Weasley had a cut lip and Lucius had been hit in the eye by an encyclopedia of Toadstools. He was still holding Ginny's old transfiguration book. He thrust it at her, his eyes glittering with malice.

"Here girl--take your book--it's the best your father can give you..." Pulling himself out of Hagrid's grip he beckoned to Draco and swept from the shop.

"Yeh should've ignored him, Arthur," Said Hagrid, almost lifting Arthur off his feet as he straightened his robes. "Rotten ter the core, the whole family, everyone knows that--come on now--let's get outta here."

The assistant looked as though he wanted to stop them from leaving, but he barely came up to Hagrid's waist and seemed to think better of it. They hurried up the street, the Granger's shaking with fright and Molly Weasley beside herself with fury.

"A fine example to set for your children--brawling in public...what Gilderoy Lockhart must've thought..."

"That perhaps he's missing out on all of the fun?" Hally blurted out her question

"Raven!" Severus warned the raven-red-streak-haired girl

"He was pleased," said Fred. "Didn't you hear him as we were leaving? He was asking that bloke from the Daily Prophet if he'd be able to work the fight into his report--said it was all publicity..."

But it was a subdued group that headed back to the fireside in the Leaky Cauldron, where Harry, Hally, Severus, The Weasley's, and all their shopping would be traveling back to the burrow using Floo powder.

They said good-bye to the Grangers, who were leaving the pub for the muggle street on the other side; Mr. Weasley started to ask them how bus stops worked, but stopped quickly at the look on Molly's face.

Harry took off his glasses and put them safely in his pocket before helping himself to Floo powder, and stepping into the fireplace with his twin sister Hally. It definitely was not his favorite way to travel.

A/N: That is all for chapter 15 see you in chapter 16 bye for now.

Chapter 16

Harry took off his glasses, putting them safely into his pocket before helping himself to some Floo Powder and stepping into the fireplace with his twin sister Hally. It certainly was not his favorite way to travel...

They returned to the burrow with no problems this time around, stepping out of the fireplace, and finding Molly Weasley giving her husband a piece of her mind while Severus had just arrived himself. The three stood on the side-lines watching the spectacle.

"DO YOU HAVE DOXIES IN YOUR BRAIN ARTHUR?" Molly boomed out her demanding question

Arthur rose up his right hand with his index finger lifted straight up, he was about to make a reply, but was cut short.

"YOU SHOULD BE A SHAMED OF YOURSELF ARTHUR! ROLLING AROUND THE FLOOR IN A PUBLIC PLACE...FIGHTING WITH LUCIUS MALFOY FOR THAT MATTER!" Molly bellowed out at her husband. Arthur could only keep his eyes from her view.

Molly began slamming tea cups onto the table before snatching her tea kettle to make the afternoon tea. She grumbled to herself before turning around swiftly.

"MEN CAN BE SUCH BABIES WHEN IT COMES TO FIGHTING!" Molly lashed out, glaring at Arthur in anger.

"I'm sorry Molly," Arthur simply said, his face turning red from embarrassment

Severus cleared his throat, getting his twins' attention. "You two certainly did not help the situation by encouraging Arthur on with your actions," Severus commented

Harry gave him a sheepish grin while Hally gave out a huff before speaking. "Well it served Mr. Malfoy right to get socked in the eye!

Putting Mr. Weasley down on account of his job...and if I was still there, I'd give Malfoy such a punch too!" Hally blurted out

Molly whipped her head toward Hally in shock while Arthur slapped the table grinning from ear to ear. "That a girl Hally! Show those Malfoy's that they aren't perfect..."

"ARTHUR!" Molly boomed out making Arthur wince slightly

Hally looked up at Severus, noticing the stern look upon his face. "Oh no," she groaned

"Oh yes Raven, since you are still acting too much like a tomboy; you young lady will be coming with me this instant," Severus announced

"But dad...", "Gather your robes Raven," Severus told her

Hally let out a sigh, going to fetch her robes while dragging her feet.

"She'll be back later Molly," Severus announced

"Now Severus, don't be too hard on her," Molly stated

"She needs to act more like a young lady instead of acting like a wild child," Severus announced looking down at Harry next.

Harry put his hands up in defense, "I swear dad, Hal hasn't been that much of a trouble being here! This just started!" Harry reasoned

Severus gave Harry a slight smirk before ushering Hally out of the small house along with him.

SCHOOL OF ETIQUETTE FOR YOUNG WITCHES AND WIZARDS

Hally stood beside Severus, her gaze straying around the room, seeing other witches and wizards conversing with one another until her eyes landed on a group far off to the left side of the room, recognizing them immediately...many Slytherins were present.

Severus was speaking with witch in charge of the school before looking down at his adopted daughter. "Raven, go on. I'll come to get you in two hours," Severus told her seeing her take off to where the group was standing.

Draco Malfoy was among the Slytherins, enjoying himself until he noticed Hally coming their way. "Oh gods, it's her," He sneered getting the other's attention. Flint who stood beside him and Etre, stepped forward to greet Hally.

"Well if it isn't our little Pixie Dust. Why are you here?" Flint enquired

"Dad thinks that I still need to act like a young lady than what I am right now....,"

They heard Draco Malfoy let out a snort. Hally turned to glare at him "And that's because of you Malfoy, and I still should have knocked you on your butt at Flourish and Blotts when I had the chance," Hally sneered before turning away from the platinum-blonde haired boy.

Flint gave Draco a slight glance, grinning from ear to ear. "Don't mind him Hally, he's just ticked because his mother felt the same thing just like your father did. It's his first day here as well." Flint announced

Hally looked at Draco, seeing his ears turn pink, "Good. Maybe he won't be anything like his father," Hally commented before going over to where the Slytherin girls were close by. Draco watched her walk away before tapping Flint on his shoulder.

"Flint, you will never guess what is under little Potter's robes," Draco spoke in low key, grinning evilly

Flint looked down at Draco with narrowed eyes, "What are you talking about Malfoy? What is under her robes?" Flint questioned

Draco pointed over Hally's way with a sly grin, Flint and Etre both followed to where he was pointing just as Hally hung up her robes, turning around. They're mouths dropped open at least four inches.

"Oh Sweet Merlin," Etre blurted out

“Our Pixie Dust isn’t so little anymore,” Flint commented in surprise tilting his head slightly over Hally’s new appearance.

Draco continued to grin evilly at Flint and Etre’s reaction. “Trust me you two, little Potter is going to get major enquiries quite soon,” he replied looking away at last

The head witch clapped her hands together, gathering the students to the center of the room to begin the class.

Severus returned to collect Hally two hours later, noticing her face flushed to a light pink color. “Raven...,” “Dad can we go now please?” Hally asked keeping her eyes averted from him

“Now what has gotten you into this mood...,”

“Lady Hex, call me,” one of the Slytherins called out grinning at Hally slyly

“Keep in touch Hally, you sneaky minx,” Flint grinned, raising his eyebrows up and down at her.

Severus realized just then, that Hally was being noticed suddenly. He chuckled quietly

“I see. Well it was bound to happen sometime Raven, let’s go,” Severus grinned while Hally grabbed his hand swiftly as they left the school.

THE WHOMPING WILLOW

The end of the summer vacation came too quickly for the twins’ liking. They was looking forward to getting back to Hogwarts, but their two months at the Burrow had been one of the happiest of their lives. It was difficult not to feel a little jealous of Ron when he and his twin brothers tormented their former uncle and their fat cousin Dudley in Surrey.

On their last evening, Mrs. Weasley conjured up a sumptuous dinner that included all of Harry and Hally's favorite things, ending with a mouthwatering treacle pudding. Fred and George rounded off the evening with a display of Filibuster fireworks; they filled the kitchen with red and blue stars that bounced from ceiling to wall for at least half an hour. Then it was time for a last mug of hot chocolate and bed.

It took a long while to get started the next morning. They were up at dawn, but somehow they still seemed to have a great deal to do. Mrs. Weasley dashed about in a bad mood looking for spare socks and quills; people kept colliding on the stairs, half-dressed with bits of toast in their hands; and Mr. Weasley nearly broke his neck, tripping over a stray chicken as he crossed the yard carrying Ginny's trunk to the car.

Neither Harry nor Hally couldn't see how nine people, seven large trunks, three owls, and a rat were going to fit into one small Ford Anglia. They had reckoned of course, without the special features that Mr. Weasley had added.

"Not a word to Molly," he whispered to the twins as he opened the trunk and showed them how it had been magically expanded so that the luggage fitted easily.

When at last they were all in the car, Mrs. Weasley glanced into the back seat, where Harry, Hally, Ron, Fred, George, and Percy were all sitting comfortably side by side, and said, "Muggles do know more than we give them credit for, don't they?" She and Ginny got into the front seat, which had been stretched so that it resembled a park bench. "I mean, you'd never know it was this roomy from the outside, would you?"

The twins glanced at each other quickly, hiding grins, and keeping their mouths closed after hearing Molly's ranting.

Mr. Weasley started up the engine and they trundled out of the yard, the twins turning back for a last look at the house. They barely had time to wonder when they'd see it again when they're school year ended—George had forgotten his box of Filibuster fireworks. Five minutes after that, they skidded to a halt in the yard so that Fred

could run in for his broomstick. They had almost reached the highway when Ginny shrieked that she'd left her diary. By the time she has clambered back into the car, they were running very late, and tempers were running high.

Mr. Weasley glanced at his watch and then at his wife.

"Molly, dear....,"

"No, Arthur....,"

"No one would see—this little button here is an invisibility booster I installed—that'd get us up in the air—then we fly above the clouds. We'd be there in ten minutes and no one would be any the wiser....,"

"I said no, Arthur, not in broad daylight....,"

They reached King's Cross at a quarter to eleven. Mr. Weasley dashed across the road to get trolleys for their trunks and they all hurried into the station.

Harry and Hally had caught the Hogwarts train the previous year before colliding with each other. The tricky part was getting onto platform nine and three-quarters, which wasn't visible to the Muggle eye. What you had to do was walk through the solid barrier dividing platforms nine and ten. It didn't hurt, but it had to be done carefully so that none of the Muggles noticed you vanishing.

"Percy first," said Mrs. Weasley, looking nervously at the clock overhead, which showed they had only five minutes to disappear casually through the barrier.

Percy strode briskly forward and vanished. Mr. Weasley went next, Fred and George followed.

"I'll take Ginny and you three come right after us," Mrs. Weasley told Harry, Hally, and Ron, grabbing Ginny's hand and setting off. In the blink of an eye they were gone.

“Let’s go together, we’ve only got a minute,” Ron said to Harry and Hally. Harry gave him a nod while Hally shook her head no.

“Hal!” Harry cried out in disbelief

“I’m not hitting that wall,” Hally blurted out suddenly, her eyes focused on the unseen barrier.

Ron started to laugh at her remark, “It’s not going to hurt Hally...,”

“It’s closed up Ron! We’re not going to be able to get through to the platform,” Hally announced

Harry gave her a slight nudge, “Why Hal?” he asked

“I dunno, but it’s closed up tight Harry. That’s what I saw,” Hally could only explain truthfully

Ron rolled his eyes at her comment, “Let me guess, from a vision...,” He was about to sneer out until he gulped when Hally got into his face.

“Yes it was Ron Weasley!” Hally seethed at him

Harry stepped in between the two swiftly, “Stop fighting you two, you’re both creating a scene,” Harry told them making them look around the station. Several people walked past them giving them a glance here and there. A few seconds later the Muggles walked past them without any notice.

Ron shook his head at Hally, grabbing a hold of his trolley, “You can stay here if you want Hally, but I’m going to at least try to go through,” He stated, then looked at Harry in shock as he seen him take a step back.

“Harry...,” “Sorry Ron, but Hal hasn’t gotten a vision wrong yet. I’m staying here with her,” Harry told him

Ron shrugged his shoulders, “Suit yourself then,” he simply said, getting ready to take a running start at the barrier.

Hally gave her big brother Harry a slight nudge, "Watch this Harry. This will be priceless," Hally whispered crossing her arms and grinning evilly.

They watched as Ron took off for the barrier. "CRASH!"

Both twins bursted into cackling laughter seeing Ron sprawled out onto the floor after his trolley hit the barrier and bounced backward, knocking him off of his feet. People all around them stared and a guard nearby yelled, "What in blazes d'you think your doing?"

"He lost control of his trolley," Harry sniggered, trying to control his laughter while Ron clutched his ribs as he got back up onto his feet.

Ron looked over at the twins, seeing them snigger, "Oh shut up you two," he groaned in misery

Harry looked at his little sister, "Why can't we get through Hal?" Harry questioned her

"I told you, I don't know Harry," Hally answered once more

Ron looked wildly around. A dozen of curious people were still watching them.

"We're going to miss the train," Ron whispered. "I don't understand why the gateway's sealed itself..."

The twins looked up at the giant clock with a sickening feeling in the pit of their stomachs. Ten seconds...nine seconds...

Ron wheeled his trolley forward cautiously until it was right against the barrier and pushed with all his might. The metal remained solid.

Three seconds...two seconds...one second...

"It's gone," Said Ron, sounding stunned. "The train's left. What if Mum and Dad can't get back through to us? Have you got any Muggle money Harry?"

Harry raised his eyebrows up at him. "Not since I stayed with Aunt Petunia and our ex-Uncle Ron," he answered

Ron pressed his ears to the cold barrier. Hally let out a sigh, already bored with Ron's stunned reaction. "I'm calling dad," she announced getting ready to head of King's Cross.

"Can't hear a thing," Ron said tensely. "What're we going to do? I don't know how long it'll take Mum and Dad to get back to us...calling your dad?" Ron suddenly asked in bewilderment

"Yeah Ron. How do you think we're going to go to Hogwarts? In your dad's car?" Hally questioned while she rolled her eyes

"I think Hal is right. We should wait by the car first for your parents," Harry said thoughtfully. "We're attracting too much atten..."

"Harry!" Ron said, his eyes gleaming. "The car!"

"What about it?" both twins asked at once

"We can fly the car to Hogwarts!"

"But I thought..."

"We're stuck, right? And we've got to get to school, haven't we? And even underage wizards and witches are allowed to use magic if it's a real emergency, section nineteen or something of the Restricted of Thingy--"

"But your Mum and Dad..." said Harry, while Hally closed her eyes in irritation over Ron's crazy idea.

"They don't need the car!" said Ron impatiently. "They know how to Apparate! You know, just vanish and reappear at home! They only bother with Floo powder and the car because we're all underage and we're not allowed to Apparate yet..."

"No way!" Hally exclaimed suddenly shaking her head repeatedly while Harry's feeling of panic turned suddenly to excitement.

"Can you fly it?" Harry blurted his question

"Harry James!" Hally cried out with wide eyes

"No problem," Said Ron, ignoring Hally's words and wheeling his trolley around to face the exit. "C'mon, let's go. If we hurry we'll be able to follow the Hogwarts Express--"

"I said no way! That would be breaking too many school rules! Plus we could get expelled if we're caught..."

"Oh C'mon Hally! We need to get to school and it's the only decision that can work," Ron pleaded with the raven-red-streak-haired girl

"And I say we call our dad!" Hally seethed

Harry put his hand on her shoulder just then. "Come on Hal. He does have a point. Look if we get into trouble, me and Ron both will be your personal slaves for at least a week. Deal?" Harry offered, hoping that his twin would take up on his offer.

Hally growled in irritation, "Fine," she relented as they marched off through the crowd of curious Muggles, out of the station and back onto the side road where the old Ford Anglia was parked.

Ron unlocked the cavernous trunk with a series of taps from his wand. They heaved their luggage back in, put Hedwig and Eros on the back seat, and got into the front.

"Check that no one's watching," Ron said, starting the ignition with another tap of his wand. Harry leaned over Hally, sticking his head out of the window: Traffic was rumbling along the main road ahead, but their street was empty.

Harry put his head back inside the window. "Okah," he said while Hally closed her eyes, praying that they would not get caught by anyone.

Ron pressed a tiny silver button on the dashboard. The car around them vanished--and so did they. Both twins could feel the seat vibrating beneath them, hearing the engine, feeling their hands on their knees, and Harry felt his glasses vibrate on his nose, but for all they could see, they had become a pair of eyeballs, floating a few feet above the ground in a dingy street full of parked cars.

"Let's go," Said Ron's voice from their right.

And the ground and the dirty buildings on either side fell away, dropping out of sight as the car rose; in seconds, the whole of London lay, smoky and glittering, below them.

Then there was a popping noise, and the car, Harry, Hally, and Ron reappeared.

"Uh-oh," Said Ron, jabbing at the Invisibility Booster. "It's faulty--"

"I knew it...,"

They all pummeled it. The car vanished. Then it flickered back again.

"Hold on!" Ron yelled, and he slammed his foot on the accelerator; they shot straight into the low, woolly clouds and everything turned dull and foggy.

"Now what?" Harry asked, blinking at the solid mass of cloud pressing in on them from all sides.

"Say our last rights, because we are deep trouble," Hally replied with a sigh

"Not funny Hal," Harry shook his head at her

"We need to see the train to know what direction to go in," Ron said

Hally clicked her tongue, "You don't want to do that," she simply said getting ignored

"Dip back down again--quickly--"

"No!" Hally yelled out with wide eyes.

They dropped back beneath the clouds and twisted around in their seats, squinting at the ground, Hally on the other hand kept her eyes on her door...shaking in fear.

"I can see it!" Harry yelled. "Right ahead--there!"

The Hogwarts Express was streaking along below them like a scarlet snake.

"Due North," Said Ron, checking the compass on the dashboard.

"Okay, we'll just have to check on it every half hour or so--hold on--"

And they shot up through the clouds. A minute later, they burst out into a blaze of sunlight.

It was a different world. The wheels of the car skimmed the sea of fluffy cloud, the sky bright, endless blue under the blinding white sun.

"All we've got to worry about now are airplanes," Said Ron.

Harry and Ron looked at each other and started to laugh; for a long time, they couldn't stop. Hally, on the other hand kept her eyes from them, not liking one bit of how they were traveling.

It was as though they had been plunged into a fabulous dream. This, Harry thought to himself, was surely the only way to travel--past swirls and turrets of snowy cloud, in a car full of hot, bright sunlight, with a fat pack of toffees in the glove compartment, and the prospect of seeing Fred and George's jealous faces when they landed smoothly and spectacularly on the sweeping lawn in front of Hogwarts castle.

They made regular checks on the train as they flew farther and farther north, each dip beneath the clouds showing them a different view. London was soon far behind them, replaced by neat green

fields that gave way in turn to wide, purplish moors, a great city alive with cars like multicolored ants, villages with tiny toy churches.

Several uneventful hours later, however, Harry had to admit that some of the fun was wearing off. The toffees had made him and Ron extremely thirsty and they had nothing to drink. The boys had pulled off their sweaters, but Harry's T-shirt was sticking to the back of his seat and his glasses kept sliding down to the end of his sweaty nose. He had stopped noticing the fantastic cloud shapes now and was thinking longingly of the miles below, where you could buy ice-cold pumpkin juice from a trolley pushed by a plump witch. Why hadn't they been able to get onto platform nine and three-quarters?

"Can't be much further, can it?" Croaked Ron, hours later still, as the sun started to sink into their floor of cloud, staining it a deep pink. "Ready for another check on the train?"

It was still right below them, winding its way past a snowcapped mountain. It was much darker beneath the canopy of clouds.

Ron put his foot on the accelerator and drove them upward again, but as he did so, the engine began to whine.

Hally shook her head solemnly while Harry and Ron exchanged nervous glances.

"It's probably just tired," said Ron. "It's never been this far before..."

And the two boys pretended not to noticed the whining growing louder and louder as the sky became steadily darker. Stars were blossoming in the blackness. Harry pulled his sweater back on, trying to ignore the way the windsheild wipers were now waving feebly as though in protest.

"Not far," Said Ron, more to the car than to Harry and Hally. "Not far now," and he patted the dashboard nervously.

When they flew back beneath the clouds a little while later, they had to squint through the darkness for a landmark they knew.

"There!" Harry shouted, making Hally jump out of her day dreaming state and making Ron along with Hedwig and Eros jump. "Straight ahead!"

Silhouetted on the dark horizon, high on the cliff over the lake, stood the many turrets and towers of Hogwarts castle.

But the car had begun to shudder and was losing speed.

"Come on," Ron urged cajolingly, giving the steering wheel a little shake, "Nearly there, come on--"

The engine groaned. Narrow jets of steam were issuing from under the hood. Harry found himself gripping the edges of his seat while Hally scrambled into the back seat, knowing what was to come from her latest vision as they flew toward the lake.

The car gave a nasty wobble. Glancing out of the window, Harry saw the smooth, black, glassy surface of the water, a mile below. Ron's knuckles were white on the steering wheel. The car wobbled again.

"Come on," Ron muttered. Hally leaned forward in the back seat.

"If you played smart Harry, you'll jump back here where I am right now," Hally warned her big brother in low-key.

Harry did not hesitate one second, he quickly jumped in the back seat with Hally making sure that they were both secure as well as they're owls, Ron just shook his head and continued to focus on ahead.

They were over the lake--the castle was right ahead--Ron put his foot down.

There was a loud clunk, a splutter, and the engine died completely. "Uh-oh," Ron said, into the silence. Harry grabbed a hold of his little sister, holding onto her tightly.

The nose of the car dropped. They were falling, gathering speed, heading straight for the solid castle wall.

"Nooooo!" Ron yelled out in a very loud pitch, swinging the steering wheel around; they missed the dark stone was by inches as the car turned in a great arc, soaring over the dark greenhouses, then the vegetable garden patch, and then over the black lawns, losing altitude all the time.

Hally let out a loud screech before yelling, "Oh gods the red orb is going to kill us both!" She screamed before hiding her face in her big brother's shoulder.

Ron let go of the steering wheel completely and pulled his wand out of his back pocket--

"STOP! STOP!" He yelled, wracking the dashboard and the windsheild, but they were still plummeting , the ground flying up toward them--

"WATCH OUT FOR THAT TREE!" Harry bellowed, getting ready to leap forward to lung for the steering wheel, but too late--

CRUNCH.

With an earsplitting bang of metal on wood, they hit the thick tree trunk and dropped to the ground with a heavy jolt. Steam was billowing from under the crumpled hood; Hedwig and Eros was Shrieking in terror, a golfball-lump was throbbing on Ron's head from where he hit the windsheild; and behind him the twins let out a low despairing groan from being jostled around.

"Are you okay?" Harry asked urgently to Ron

"My wand," said Ron, in a shaky voice. "Look at my wand--"

It had snapped, almost in two; the tip was dangling limply, held on by a few splinters. Hally looked ahead of them breathing heavily. Harry opened his mouth to say he sure they'd be able to mend it up at the school, but he never got started. At the very moment, something hit his side of the car with the force of a charging bull, sending him lurching sideways into his twin sister Hally, just as an equally heavy blow hit the roof.

"What's Happen--?"

"THE TREE!" Hally shrieked out pointing at the windsheild. Ron turned around in his seat, gasping and staring through the windsheild, and Harry looked around just in time to see a branch as thick as a python smash into it. The tree they had hit was indeed attacking them. Its trunk was bent almost double, and its gnarled boughs were pummeling every inch of the car it could reach.

Hally quickly lept forward, snatching Ron by the scruff of his shirt. "GET US OUT OF HERE! NOW!" She bellowed out

"Aaargh!" Ron yelled as another twisted limb punched a large dent into his door; the windsheild was now trembling under a hail of blows from the knuckle-like twigs and a branch as thick as a battering ram was pounding furiously on the roof, which seemed to be caving--

"Run for it!" Ron shouted, throwing his full weight against his door, but next second he had been nearly knocked back to where the twins were by a vicious uppercut from another branch.

"We're done for!" He moaned, as the ceiling sagged, but suddenly the floor of the car was vibrating--the engine had restarted.

"Reverse!" Harry yelled, and the car shot backward; the tree was still trying to hit them; they could hear its roots creaking as it almost ripped itself up, lashing out at them as they sped out of reach.

"That," Ron panted "Was close. Well done, car--"

The car, however, had reached the end of its tether. With two sharp clunks, the doors flew open and the twins felt their seat tip sideways: Next thing they both knew they was sprawled on the damp ground. Loud thuds told them that the car was ejecting their luggage from the trunk; Hedwig, Eros, and Scabbers cages flew through the air and burst open; the owls rose out of it with an angry screech and sped off toward the castle without a backward look. Then, dented, scratched, and steaming, the car rumbled off into the darkness, its rear lights blazing angrily.

"Come back!" Ron yelled after it, brandishing his broken wand. "Dad'll kill me!"

But the car disappeared from view from one last snort from its exhaust.

"Can you believe our luck?" Ron said miserably, bending down to pick up Scabbers. "Of all the trees we could've hit, we had to get one that hits back."

Hally snapped her head at him in anger after watching her owl fly toward the castle. "Its called the Whomping Willow Ron! It's been here for years!" Hally nearly shouted at him

Ron glanced over his shoulder at the ancient tree, which was still flailing its branches threateningly.

"Come on," Harry told them wearily, "We'd better get up to the school..."

It wasn't all the triumphant arrival they had pictured. Stiff, cold, and bruised, they seized the ends of their trunks and began dragging them up the grassy slope, toward the great oak front doors.

"I think the feast's already started," Ron said, dropping his trunk at the foot of the front steps and crossing quietly to look through a brightly lit window. "Hey--Harry, Hally--come and look--it's the Sorting!"

The twins hurried over and together, Harry, Hally, and Ron peered in at the Great Hall.

Innumerable candles were hovering in midair over four long, crowded tables, making the golden plates and goblets sparkle. Overhead, the bewitched ceiling, which always mirrored the sky outside, sparkled with stars.

Through the forest of pointed black Hogwarts hats, the twins saw a long line of scared-looking first years filing into the Hall. Ginny was

among them, easily visible because of her vivid Weasley hair. Meanwhile, Professor McGonagall, a bespectacled witch with her hair in a tight bun, was placing the famous Hogwarts Sorting Hat on a stool before the newcomers.

Every year, this aged old hat, patched, frayed, and dirty, sorted new students into the four Hogwarts houses (Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin). The twins well remembered putting it on, exactly one year ago, and waiting, petrified, for its decision as it muttered aloud in their ears. For a few horrible seconds Harry feared that the hat was going to place him in Slytherin and Hally remembered miserably being placed in Gryffindor along with Harry, but also thought that if it wasn't for that, her and Harry would never had been brought together. Harry thought the same at that moment.

A very small, mousy-haired boy had been called forward to place the hat on his head. The twin's eyes wandered past him to where Professor Dumbledore, the headmaster, sat watching the Sorting from the staff table, his long silver beard and half-moon glasses shining brightly in the candlelight. Several seats along, Harry and Hally both saw Gilderoy Lockhart, dressed in robes of aquamarine. And there at the end was Hagrid, huge and Hairy, drinking deeply from his goblet.

"Hang on..." Harry muttered to Hally and Ron. "There's an empty chair at the staff table...Where's dad?"

Professor Severus Snape adopted both twins at different times, wasn't Ron's favorite teacher, nor was he Severus's favorite student. Ron at first thought him as Cruel, sarcastic, and disliked by everybody except the students from his own house (Slytherin)...he was wrong, Snape taught potions.

"Maybe he's ill," Ron said, not wanting to upset the twins too much.

Hally slowly turned her eyes to him, "Oh sure Ron. Why not say that he's left," She said feeling highly irritated at that moment at the red-haired boy

"Or that maybe he's been sacked!" Harry seethed quietly at Ron feeling irritated as well

"Well," Ron commented feeling a bit embarrassed. "Not everyone likes him..."

"Or maybe," said a very cold voice right behind the three, "He's waiting to hear why you three didn't arrive on the school train."

The twins spun around. There, his black robes rippling in a cold breeze, stood their father Severus Snape. He was smiling at them in a cold manner that told Harry, and Hally that they were in a big heap of trouble as well as Ron.

"Follow me," Severus told them sternly

Not daring even to look at each other, Harry, Hally, and Ron followed Severus up the steps into the vast, echoing entrance hall, which was lit with flaming torches. A delicious smell of food was wafting from the Great Hall, but Severus led them away from the warmth and light, down a narrow stone staircase that led into the dungeons.

"In!" He said, opening a door halfway down the cold passageway and pointing.

They entered the potion master's office, shivering. The shadow walls were lined with shelves of large glass jars, in which floated all manner of revolting things Harry never really wanted to know until his twin sister explained what they were. The fireplace was dark and empty. Severus closed the door and turned to look at the three.

"So," He said softly, "The train isn't good enough for my twins and one of their faithful sidekick Mr. Weasley. Wanted to arrive with a bang, did we, you three?"

"No sir, it was the barrier at King's Cross, it--"

"Silence!" Said Severus coldly to Hally. Hally leaned back in her seat with wide eyes. "What have you three done with the car?"

Ron gulped. This wasn't the first time. Severus had given them all the impression of being able to read minds. But a moment later, he understood, as Severus unrolled today's issue of the evening prophet.

"You were seen," Severus hissed, showing them the headline: FLYING FORD ANGLIA MYSTIFIES MUGGLES. He began to read aloud: "Two Muggles in London, convinced they saw an old car flying over the Post Office tower...at noon in Norfolk, Mrs. Hetty Bayliss, while hanging out her washing...Mr. Angus Fleet, of Peebles, reported to police...Six or seven Muggles in all. I believe your father works in the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office?" Severus said looking up at Ron and smiling still more nastily. "Dear, dear...his own son..."

The twin's felt as though they had been walloped in the stomach by one of the mad tree's larger branches. If anyone found out Mr. Weasley had bewitched the car...they hadn't thought of that...

"I also noticed, in my search of the park, that considerable damage seems to have been done to a very valuable Whomping Willow," Severus went on

"That tree did more damage to us than we--" Ron blurted out.

"Silence!" Severus snapped again. "Most unfortunately, you three are not in my House and the decision to expel you does not rest with me. I shall go and fetch the people who do have that happy power. You three wait here."

"Dad...", "Be silent Raven!" Severus boomed out leaving his office.

Hally remained quiet with her eyes downcasted while Harry and Ron stared at each other, white-faced. The three didn't feel so hungry anymore. They felt more sick. Harry tried not to look at a large, slimy something suspended in green liquid on a shelf behind Severus's desk. If Severus had gone to fetch Professor McGonagall, head of Gryffindor House, they were hardly any better off. She might be fairer than Severus, but she was still extremely strict.

Ten minutes later, Severus returned, and sure enough it was Professor McGonagall angry on several occasions, but either they

had gotten just how thin her mouth could go, or they had never seen her this angry before. She raised her wand the moment she entered; Harry, Hally, and Ron both flinched, but she merely pointed it at the empty fireplace, where flames suddenly erupted.

"Sit," She said, and they all three sat back down into the chairs by the fireplace

"Explain," she said, her glasses glinting ominously. Hally who remained silent, noticed the anger and disappointment in Severus's eyes. She looked down at the floor, not saying a word.

Ron launched into the story, starting with the barrier at the station refusing to let them through.

"...so we had no choice, Professor, we couldn't get on the train."

"Why didn't you send us a letter by owl? I believe you two have an owl?" Professor McGonagall said coldly to Harry and Hally.

Harry gasped at her. Now she said it, that seemed the obvious thing to have done. He then realized that his sister Hally was trying to do the right thing. Hally could only look up at McGonagall and nod at her slightly, staying silent.

"I-I didn't think--"

"That," Professor McGonagall said, "is obvious."

There was a knock on the office door and Severus, now looking more relaxed, opened it. There stood the headmaster, Professor Dumbledore.

The twin's bodies went numb. Dumbledore was looking unusually grave. He stared down his very crooked nose at them, and Harry suddenly found himself wishing that he and Ron were still being beaten up by the Whomping Willow, what was worse was he thought, his sister did not deserve any of the situation since she was only trying to keep them out of trouble.

There was a long silence. Then Dumbledore said, "Please explain why you three did this."

It would have been better if he had shouted. Harry hated the disappointment in his voice. For some reason, he was unable to look Dumbledore in the eyes, and spoke instead to his knees. He told Dumbledore everything except that Mr. Weasley owned the bewitched car, making it sound as though he, Hally, and Ron had happened to find a flying car parked outside the station. He knew Dumbledore would see through this at once, but Dumbledore asked no questions about the car. When Harry had finished, he merely continued to peer at them through his spectacles.

"We'll go and get our stuff," Said Ron in a hopeless sort of voice

"What are you talking about, Weasley?" Barked Professor McGonagall

"Well, you're expelling us, aren't you?" Ron asked

the twins looked up at Dumbledore. "Not today, Mr. Weasley," Dumbledore answered. "But I must impress upon you three the seriousness of what you have done. I will be writing to your parents Mr. Weasley tonight, I must also warn you three that if you do anything like this again, I will have no choice but to expel you all."

Severus cleared his throat, "Professor Dumbledore...,"

"THANKS A LOT RON ON GETTING US INTO TROUBLE!" Hally boomed out heatedly, shocking everyone

"Raven sit down..."

"ITS OUR ONLY CHANCE TO GET TO HOGWARTS HE SAYS!
COME ON HALLY WE NEED TO GET TO SCHOOL HE SAYS!
WELL WE'RE HERE RON AND LOOK WHERE IT GOT US ALL!"
Hally bellowed out

"Oh my," McGonagall commented seeing Hally go off on the red-haired boy in anger

"Hally...," "SHUT UP RON! GET READY TO DO SOME DIRTY WORK ORBY, BECAUSE I'M GOING TO MAKE YOUR FIRST WEEK BACK A LIVING HELL!" Hally shrieked out before taking a swing

WRACK!

"RAVEN!" Severus boomed after seeing Hally lay Ron out flat onto the cold stone floor

Harry covered his stomach, laughing so hard that he hit the floor. "Welcome back you red haired dirt sniffer!" Hally seethed taking out of Severus's office.

"Raven, you get back...,"

"No dad. Ron deserved what he got. Hal wanted to get in touch with you, but we pressured her into coming along with us in the car. Hal was totally against it the whole time," Harry explained truthfully

"Yes, but be as it may...oh just leave the boy there, perhaps it would give him something to think about." McGonagall replied

"Not in your lifetime woman," Severus spoke out looking at Ron stiffly

"Yes well...come along then Harry, let's get you something to eat," McGonagall beckoned ushering the raven-haired boy out of Severus's office.

Severus gave Ron one last look before heading out of his office with Dumbledore, closing the door behind him.

A/N: That is all for chapter 16. See you all in chapter 17 bye for now

Chapter 17

Severus took one last look at Ron before heading out of his office, closing the door behind him...

Walking further down along the narrow stone staircase, Harry told them what had happened between him, Hally and Ron beginning at King's Cross and ending here.

"Hal, didn't like the idea one bit Professor. She was against it the whole way here," Harry added

"Well be that as it may, she still went along with the you and Mr. Weasley," Professor McGonagall replied, "Even if she was pressured into it," she added thoughtfully

"Professor, when we took the car, term hadn't started, so—so Gryffindor shouldn't have any points taken from it—should it?" Harry asked, watching McGonagall anxiously.

Professor McGonagall gave him a piercing look, but he was sure she had smiled. Her mouth looked less thin, anyway.

"I will not take any points from Gryffindor," she said, and Harry's heart lightened considerably, "But you three will get a detention."

It was better than Harry had expected. As for Dumbledore's writing to the Weasley's, that was nothing. Whatever happened to Ron, it would Ron's problem and not his. They all found Hally waiting at the top of the staircase, sitting with her arms around her knees. She was waiting for her big brother. Her eyes had redness around them as if she was crying, and hearing light sniffles coming from her had confirmed it. Harry, McGonagall, and Dumbledore moved to the side, allowing Severus through. The potions master looked down at Hally, who kept her eyes down, not looking at them. Severus touched the top of Hally's head.

"Come along Raven, let's get you and Connor something to eat," He sighed at last

Hally stood up on her feet quietly, wiping her eyes with the sleeve of her shirt. Harry put his arms around his twin sister's shoulder.

"Come on Hal. Just like I promised, I'll wait on you hand and foot for an entire week," Harry commented as they headed towards Severus's living quarters.

"Where's Ron?" Hally asked them suddenly, She heard Harry snigger

"Still out cold on dad's office floor," Harry answered her

"Until Filch finds him there," Severus replied

"Such talk Severus," McGonagall simply said

"I hope Mrs. Norris uses Ron as a scratching post," Hally blurted out before looking up at the professors

"Tea tomorrow at the usual time Miss. Potter," Professor McGonagall stated

"Man," Hally whined while Harry cackled quietly

They entered the living quarters finding Hagrid waiting there with the twin's hatchlings Silver and Iris. Hally quickly scrambled over to where Silver was standing, gathering up in her arms and struggling to lift him.

"Gods Silver what have you been eating over the last few weeks," Hally commented

"He's growin' Hally, he will get heavier than that, but not as big as Norbert though, just up to here," Hagrid explained while demonstrating the height along side of Severus.

"I know, but gods, he feels like a ton," Hally replied while Harry went towards his hatchling next.

"I hope that you two have learned your lesson on this night," Severus stated clearly

"Yes sir," the twins answered at once

A huge platter of sandwiches, three goblets, and a jug of iced pumpkin juice appeared on the small round table with a pop.

"You will eat here, I have to appear at the feast...behave and no more of hitting Mr. Weasley Raven," Severus announced before walking out of his quarters and running into Ron and Filch who was escorting the red-haired boy into his quarters.

Ron looked up at Severus with a gulp, "Do not touch anything," He warned the boy and walked around him heading out the door.

"I must also return to the feast..."

"But Professor, I wanted to watch my sister being sorted..."

"The sorting ceremony is over Mr. Weasley. Your sister is also in Gryffindor," McGonagall intervened

"Oh, good," Ron said in a mumble watching Professor McGonagall leave, before letting out a long, low whistle.

"I thought we'd had it," he said at last

"So did I," Harry agreed with a sigh of relief. Hally glared over at Ron every few seconds, she was still angry over them getting into deep trouble over the car.

Ron could not take Hally's glares no longer. "I'm sorry Hally, ok? I promise to do whatever it is that you want me to do for a whole week," Ron apologized

"Oh, you will Ron, you will," Hally assured him before giving her attention to Silver

Ron went toward the two with their hatchlings, "Hello Silver, Hello Iris," Ron greeted the hatchlings

“Orby,” Silver rambled out

“Radish head,” Iris blurted out next

“They’re still calling me those names,” Ron groaned

Hally looked at the two while containing a grin, “Well Ron, that is what they know you as,” she commented truthfully

“Yeah, two of them,” Ron mumbled more to himself than to Harry and Hally.

Harry took off his glasses after having to push them back up onto his nose properly for at the twentieth time. Hally watched him set them down before speaking up.

“You know Harry, you would look much better without those things,” Hally commented quietly

Harry turned to look at her, “You really think so?” he enquired

“Yes really. You would look darn good without them,” Hally answered him with a grin on her face. She turned to look over at Ron who was practically drooling over the food sitting on the table.

“What do you think Ron?” Hally enquired

“Huh? Oh, yeah you would look good Harry, really,” Ron answered

Harry got up to head to his and Hally’s spare bedroom, “Ok. I’ll give it a try. Be out in a second...oh and wait for us before you start eating Ron,” Harry grinned. He disappeared through the doorway while Ron gave out a small whimper. Hally could only snigger at the scene.

Seconds later, Harry came out without his glasses. “You know, I like this much better and I can get rid of these since Uncle Vernon paid for them,” Harry announced, putting his glasses inside one of their dad’s cupboards.

Ron looked at him while tilting his head, "You do look good without those things Harry. Can we eat now?" Ron asked after complimenting Harry's new look

"Yes Ron we can," both twins sniggered at him

They sat down at the table with Silver and Iris close beside the twins. Every now and then, they would thump their tails when they wanted a sandwich each.

"Can you two believe our luck?" Ron said thickly through a mouthful of chicken and ham. "Fred and George must've flown that car five or six times and no Muggles ever saw them." He swallowed and took another huge bite of his sandwich. "Why couldn't we get through the barrier?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "We'll have to watch out step for now though." He said, taking a grateful swig of pumpkin juice. "Wish we could've gone up to the feast..."

"She didn't want us showing off," Ron blurted out sagely. "Doesn't want people to think it's clever, arriving by a flying car."

Hally rolled her eyes at him, "That is not the reason why we are here Ron." Hally retorted, "We had broken some school rules and we are going to be punished for it. This is to let the other students know that we are not getting away with it."

When they had eaten as many sandwiches as they could (the plate kept refilling itself) they rose from the table and went to sit down on the sofa and spare chair at the other part of the quarters, waiting until Severus returned from the feast. Ron on the other hand wanted to go and head up to the Gryffindor Tower.

"You can't go yet Ron; we don't know the password..." There soon was a knock on the door.

"I'll get it," Harry announced going to answer the door. He opened the door finding several students from Slytherin waiting on the other side, Flint being in the front.

"All right! What happened and why wasn't you two at the feast?" Flint questioned Harry before the raven-haired boy had gotten the chance to greet him

"It's a long story," Harry answered him. Hally stopped just behind Harry while Ron stood not too far from the twins, gulping quietly.

Flint looked from Harry to Hally before straying his eyes towards Ron. "Well, let's hear it you two," Flint told them, waiting to find out why they were not present at the feast.

"Well...you see...we kind of..."

"The barrier at King's Cross sealed itself before we all three had gotten a chance to go through it," Hally intervened

Flint focused his attention to Hally next, "Sealed itself?" He asked

"Yeah Flint, somehow it closed up before we were able to go through the barrier..."

"So that was you three in that car we seen this evening?" Flint questioned them with a sly grin on his face.

"Um...yeah," both twins answered reluctantly

There suddenly became laughter from the rest of the Slytherin's who stood behind Flint and Etre.

"Wait a minute! Who was the driver?" Etre asked in between laughs

They watched while both twins turned to look at Ron quietly until silence came from the Slytherins.

"Uh-oh," Ron squeaked out seeing the look on Flint and Etre's faces.

"Weasley, you just made a big mistake....,"

Hally stopped the two older Slytherins, "Don't guys. He just became a slave of mine for one whole week," Hally spoke out getting their attention.

They took one look at Ron before sniggering, "Good luck Weasley. Your going to need it," They cackled out with others laughing right behind him.

Ron looked at Hally with wide eyes, "What did they mean by that?" he asked her

"You'll find out quite soon Ron," Hally answered him grinning evilly

Ron looked over at Harry, "Harry....,"

"No Ron, I'm in the same boat as you are and I am not talking my sister out of this. A promise is a promise," Harry replied

Flint clapped Harry on the shoulder, "My condolences to you Lord Hex," Flint sniggered out

"Flint!" Hally exclaimed in shock

"What? Hey it wasn't me hiding under a robe to keep others from finding out...how much you blossomed...ouch!" Flint cackled into laughter after being hit on the shoulder by Hally.

"That was not very nice Flint. You all kept asking me when I was available," Hally grinned at her older friend.

"Hey enquiring minds want to know...are you and Diggory still going steady?" Flint asked her

"Now Flint I told you....," "Oh yeah! They sure are Flint. They upgraded from trading cards to kissing," Harry cackled out, teasing his twin sister

"Harry James....," "Oh ho ho! The Lady Hex is kissing now is she?" Flint asked grinning slyly down at the raven-red-streak-haired girl

"Where do I sign up for one of those?" Etre asked raising his eyebrows up and down at Hally

"Oh I swear you boys are...MMM!" Hally's voice trailed off from Harry covering her mouth quickly while sniggering

"Now Hal, dad said that you would get noticed," Harry grinned seeing Hally's eyes twinkle from grinning at their antics.

"It wasn't like we wouldn't have found out. Besides, Malfoy was the one who gave us the information on your first day in Ettiquete school," Flint told them

Harry slowly looked up at Flint, growling heatedly while Hally's eyes went wide.

"Malfoy told you?" Harry asked in anger

"Yeah why?" Etre enquired

"He was spying on my sister and Hally at our swimming hole during the summer!" Ron blurted out, his face red with anger as well

Flint's eyebrows went up, "Oh is that so? We'll take care of Malfoy our way...what did he see exactly?" Flint asked the twins, noticing Harry narrowing his eyes and Hally's face turning three shades of pink instantly.

"Never mind, I got this one. That's our Pixie Dust he spied on, and he's going to find out what happens when anyone does that to her...we'll see you two at Breakfast tomorrow morning," Flint told them waving at the others to back up so that they could leave.

"See you tomorrow Flint," Both twins grinned at them before Harry closed the door.

After everyone had left the feast, Severus made his presence inside his living quarters.

"All right now you three may go to your house, however, Connor and Raven, you both are to return here within the hour since you still have a whole week to get settled in and recieve your schedules," Severus informed them taking off his black robes.

Both twins did not hesitate, taking a hold of Ron and scrambling out of the living quarters, grinning from ear to ear. "Devious imps," Severus chuckled quietly after they closed his door leaving.

The three headed past muttering portraits and creaking suits of armour, climbing narrow flights of stone stairs, until at last they reached the passage where the secret entrance to Gryffindor Tower was hidden, behind an oil painting of a very fat woman in a pink silk dress.

"Password?" She said as they approached

"Er--" Said Harry, looking at his sister in question who could only shrug her shoulders at this situation, it was the first time that Hally had gotten the password before school.

They didn't know the new year's password, not having met a Gryffindor prefect (Percy to be precise, who always made sure that Hally recieved it before hand) but help came almost immediately; they heard hurrying feet behind them and turned to see Hermione dashing toward them.

"There you three are! Where have you all been? The most ridiculous rumours--someone said you'd been expelled for crashing a flying car--"

"Well, we haven't been expelled," Harry assured her

"You're not telling me you did fly here?" Said Hermione, sounding almost as severe as Professor McGonagall.

"Skip the lecture," Said Ron impatiently, "And tell us the new password."

Hally looked at him, "Why when it was your idea to take fly the Bloody thing here in the first place." She replied stiffly

"It's 'Wattlebird' " Said Hermione impatiently, "But that's not the point-- Ron's idea..."

Her words were cut short, however, as the portrait of the fat Lady swung open and there was a sudden storm of clapping. It looked as though the whole of Gryffindor House was still awake, packed into the circular common room, standing on the lopsided tables and squashy armchairs, waiting for them to arrive. Arms reached through the portrait hole to pull Harry, Hally, and Ron inside, leaving Hermione to scramble in after them.

"Brilliant!" Yelled Lee Jordan. "Inspired! What an entrance! Flying a car right into the Whomping Willow, people'll be talking about that one for years--"

"Good for you," Said a fifth year Harry nor Hally had never spoken to; someone was patting them on the back as though they'd just won a marathon; Fred and George pushed their way to the front of the crowd and said together, "Why couldn't we've come in the car, eh?"

Ron was scarlet in the face, grinning embarrassedly, but the twins could see one person who didn't look happy at all. Percy was visible over the heads of some excited first years, and he seemed to be trying to get near enough to start telling them off. Harry nudged Ron in the ribs and nodded in Percy's direction. Ron got the point at once.

"Got to get upstairs--bit tired," he said, and the two of them started pushing their way toward the door on the other side of the room, which led to a spiral staircase and the dormitories.

"See you in a few minutes Hal!" Harry called over his shoulder to his little sister, after leaving there surrounded by their housemates.

"Oh sure Harry, leave me to the lions here!" Hally called back to him until someone let out a choking sound

"Hally?" someone called her name in stunned surprise after noticing her new change

"Oh sweet Merlin on what we are witnessing here," Lee Jordan exclaimed with wide eyes.

Hally glanced down at herself, and was about to flick out her wand when Percy took hold of her arm.

"Back off! All of you!" Percy shouted out pushing through the crowded room to let him and Hally through to the staircase.

They stopped at the bottom step while everyone had moved out of their way and began taking to one another about the whole thing.

Hally looked up to find a not so happy Percy. "Percy, before you start lecturing me, it was Ron's idea to take that flying car," Hally rambled out

Percy crossed his arms, listening to Hally's ramblings before leaning slightly toward her.

"I believe you Hally. I figured it was Ron's idea and not yours nor Harry's. I'm not angry with you two, just Ron, and Mum won't be happy when she finds out," Percy told her in a whisper grinning

"Percy, for a big blow hard, your ok." Hally grinned at him before heading to the girls dormitories to gather what she needed.

Meanwhile inside the boys dormitories, Harry and Ron had just entered the familiar, circular room, with its five four-postered hung with red velvet and its high, narrow windows. Their trunks had been brought up for them and stood at the ends of their beds.

Ron grinned guiltily at Harry.

"I know I shouldn't enjoyed that or anything, but--"

The dormitory door flew open and in came the other second year Gryffindor boys, Seamus Finnigan, Dean Thomas, and Neville Longbottom.

"Unbelievable!" Beamed Seamus.

"Cool!" Said Dean.

"Amazing," said Neville, awestruck.

Harry couldn't help it. He grinned, too.

GILDERROY LOCKHART

The next day, however, the twins barely grinned once. Things started to go downhill from breakfast in the Great Hall. The four long house tables laden with turrets of porridge, plates of kippers, mountains of toast, and dishes of eggs and bacon, beneath the enchanted ceiling (today, a dull, cloudy gray). Harry, and Hally sat down at the Slytherin table next to Blaise Zabini while at the Gryffindor table Ron sat down next to Hermione, who had her copy of *Voyages with Vampires* propped open against a milk jug. There was a slight stiffness in the way she said "Morning" to Ron, which by seeing it at a distance, told the twins that she was still disapproving of the way they had arrived, and they could not blame her for it. Neville Longbottom, on the other hand, greeted them cheerfully. Neville was a round-faced and accident-prone boy with the worst memory of anyone Harry nor Hally had ever met.

"Mail is due any minute--I think Gran's sending a few things I forgot."

Harry and Hally only just started their porridge when, sure enough, there was a rushing sound overhead and a hundred or so owls streamed in, circling the hall and dropping letters and packages into the chattering crowd. A big, lumpy package bounced off Hermione's jug, spraying them all with milk and feathers. Both twins started to cackle in laughter over the scene from where they were sitting over at the Slytherin table.

"Errol!" Said Ron, pulling the bedraggled owl out by the feet. Errol slumped, unconscious, onto the table, his legs in the air and a damp red envelope in his beak.

"Oh, no--" Ron gasped.

"It's all right, he's still alive," said Hermione, prodding Errol gently with the tip of her finger.

"It's not that--it's that,"

Hally raised her head over the commotion, noticing the envelope at the same time as Harry. They both got up from the Slytherin table to go and investigate.

Ron was still pointing at the red envelope when they stopped in front of them, It looked quite ordinary to Harry, but Ron, Hally, Hermione and Neville were all looking at it as though they expected it to explode.

"What's the matter?" Harry asked them

"She's--she's sent me a howler," said Ron faintly.

"You'd better open it, Ron," Neville said in a timid whisper. "It'll be worse if you don't. My Gran sent me one once, and I ignored it and"--he gulped--"it was horrible."

Harry looked from their petrified faces to the red envelope.

"What's a Howler?" He asked

But Ron's whole attention was fixd on the letter, which had begun to smoke at the corners.

"Open it" Neville urged. "It'll all be over in a few minutes--"

Ron stretched out a shaking hand, eased the envelope from Errol's beak, and slit it open. Neville stuffed his fingers in his ears, Hally quickly ducked under the Gryffindor table after recieving a flashed vision while Hermione sat where she was and Harry stood in his

place, still wanting to know what a howler was. A second later Harry knew why. He thought for a moment it had exploded; a roar of sound filled the huge hall, shaking dust from the ceiling.

"--STEALING THE CAR, I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SURPRISED IF THEY'D EXPELLED YOU, YOU WAIT TILL I GET HOLD OF YOU, I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU STOPPED TO THINK WHAT YOUR FATHER AND I WENT THROUGH WHEN WE SAW IT WAS GONE--"

Mrs. Weasley's yells, a hundred times louder than usual, made the plates and spoons rattle on the table, and echoed deafeningly off the stone walls. People throughout the hall were swiveling around to see who had received the Howler, and Ron sank so low in his chair that only his crimson forehead could be seen.

"--LETTER FROM DUMBLEDORE LAST NIGHT, I THOUGHT YOUR FATHER WOULD DIE OF SHAME, WE DIDN'T BRING YOU UP TO BEHAVE LIKE THIS, YOU, HARRY AND HALLY COULD HAVE DIED--"

Harry had been wondering when his and his sister's name was going to crop up. He tried very hard to look as though he couldn't hear the voice that was making his eardrums throb. Hally on the other hand remained under the Gryffindor table, lying on her side, and twiddling with her wand without a care.

"--ABSOLUTELY DISGUSTED--YOUR FATHER'S FACING AN ENQUIRY AT WORK, IT'S ENTIRELY YOUR FAULT AND IF YOU PUT ANOTHER TOE OUT OF LINE WE'LL BRING YOU STRAIGHT BACK HOME."

A ringing silence fell. The red envelope, which had dropped from Ron's hand, burst into flames, and curled into ashes. Hally decided at that moment to come out from under the table, brushing herself off, while Harry and Ron were stunned, as though a tidal wave had just passed over them. A few people laughed and, gradually, a babble of talk broke out again.

Hermione closed Voyages with Vampired and looked down at the top of Ron's head.

"Well, I don't know what you expected, Ron, but you--"

"Don't tell me I deserved it," Ron snapped.

Hally turned around looking at him next. "All right Ron, she won't have to say it, I Will...You deserved it Ron," Hally commented

More cackles, and laughter erupted from the students. Harry rubbed the back of his neck, not feeling so hungry anymore, his insides were burning with guilt. Mr. Weasley was facing an enquiry at work. After all Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had done for them over the summer...

"Don't feel that way Harry, you didn't know about it. Ron on the other hand knew that this could have happened," Hally reasoned with her older brother

However they had no time to dwell on the matter, Professor McGonagall was moving along the Gryffindor table, handing out course schedules. Harry and Hally took theirs and saw that they had double herbology with the Hufflepuffs first.

"Double Herbology?" Harry asked his twin

"She does it with all the second years Harry, trust me it will be more fun than last year," Hally grinned at him.

Harry, Hally, Ron, and Hermione left the castle together, crossed the vegetable patch, and made for the greenhouses, where the magical plants were kept. At least the Howler had done one good thing: Hermione seemed to think they had now been punished enough and was being perfectly friendly again.

As they neared the greenhouses that saw the rest of the class standing outside, waiting for Professor Sprout. Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione had only just joined them when she came striding into view across the lawn, accompanied by Gilderoy Lockhart. Professor Sprout's arms were full of bandages, and with another twinge of guilt,

Harry spotted the Whomping Willow in the distance, several of its branches now in slings.

Professor Sprout was a squat little witch who wore a patched hat over her flyaway hair; there was usually a large amount of earth on her clothes, and her fingernails would have made any female Muggle faint. Gilderoy Lockhart, however, was immaculate in sweeping robes of turquoise, his golden hair shining under a perfectly positioned turquoise hat with gold trimming.

"Oh, hello there!" He called, beaming around at the assembled students. Hally let out a gagging noise just then, making the boys snigger over her reaction to him. "Just been showing Professor Sprout the ight way to doctor a Whomping Willow! But I don't want you running away with the idea that I'm better at Herbology than she is! I just happen to have met several of these exotic plant on my travels..."

"And probably decided to run for your life!" Hally blurted out loudly, putting her hand on her chest and feigning a look of horror. The boys started to hoot into laughter just then. Professor Sprout, gave Hally a stern look while containing a grin on her face.

"Greenhouse three today, chaps!" Said Professor Sprout, who was looking distinctly disgruntled, not at all her usual cheerful self, but also relieved to get rid of Lockhart immediately.

There was a murmur of interest. They had only ever worked in greenhouse one before--greenhouse three housed far more interesting and dangerous plants. Professor Sprout took a large key from her belt and unlocked the door. The twins caught a whiff of damp earth and fertilizer mingling with the heavy perfume of some giant umbrella-sized flowers dangling from the ceiling. They was about to follow Ron and Hermione inside when Lockhart's hand shot out.

"Potters! I've been wanting a word--you don't mind if they are a couple of minutes late, do you, Professor Sprout?"

Judging by Professor Sprout's scowl, she did mind until she noticed Hally looking up at her in a manner that said "please save us from this mad man" and decided to make a reply, but got intervened by Lockhart immediately.

"That's the ticket," and closed the greenhouse door in her face.

"Harry, Hally," Said Lockhart, his large white teeth gleaming in the sunlight as he shook his head, "Harry, Hally, Harry, Hally....,"

"So you know our names, now what is it?" Hally blurted out her question high irritated by the man already.

Quickly nonplussed, Harry said nothing, feeling that his sister had just spoken for them both.

"When I heard--well, of course, it was all my fault. Could have kicked myself."

Harry nor Hally had no idea what he was talking about. They was about to say so when Lockhart went on, "Don't know when I've been more shocked. Flying a car to Hogwarts! Well, of course, I knew at once why you two done it. Stood out a mile. Harry, Hally, Harry, Hally."

It was remarkable how he could show every one of those brilliant teeth even when he wasn't talking.

"Gave you a taste for publicity, didn't I?" said Lockhart. "Gave you two the bug. You two got onto the front page of the paper with me and you couldn't wait to do it again."

"Oh, no. Professor, see--"

"Children, children, children," Said Lockhart, reaching out and gasping them on their shoulders, "I understand. Natural to want a bit more once you've had the first taste--and I blame myself for giving you two that, because it was bound to go to your heads--but see here, young man and young lady, you can't start flying cars to try and get yourselves noticed. Just calm down, all right? Plenty of time for all

that when you're both older. Yes, yes, I know what you're thinking! 'It's all right for him, he's an internationally famous wizard already !' But when I was twelve, I was just as much of a nobody as you two are now. In fact, I'd say I was even more of a nobody! I mean, few people have heard of you two, haven't they? All that business with He-Who-Must-not-Be-Named!" He glanced at their lightening scars on the twins foreheads. "I know, I know--it's not quite as good as winning Witch Weekly's Most-Charming-Smile Award five times in a row, as I have--but it's a start, you two, it's a start."

He gave Harry and Hally a hearty wink and strode off. Harry stood stunned for a few seconds, while Hally stood there fuming in anger before flicking out her wand, pointing it at the wizards retreating back and muttering a few words. A spurt of yellow light shot out of Hally's wand and landed onto Lockhart's rear, giving him a horses tail.

"There you go, you great big fraud, have something to think about when you get laughed upon by the other Professors," Hally commented while Harry blinked his eyes at Lockhart's appearance before bursting into a fit of laughter.

They opened the greenhouse door, slipping inside. Professor Sprout was standing behind a trestle bench in the center of the greenhouse. About twenty pairs of different-colored earmuffs were lying on the bench. When the twins had taken their place between Ron and Hermione, she said, "We'll be repotting Mandrakes today. Now, who can tell me the properties of the Mandrake?"

To nobody's surprise, Hally's and Hermione's hands was first into the air.

"Miss Granger...Now don't give me that look Miss. Potter, let someone else have a turn," Professor Sprout spoke up

"It's all right Professor," Hally grinned after she gave a playful pout to the Professor

"Mandrake, or Mandragora, is a powerful restorative," said Hermione, sounding as usual as though she had swallowed the textbook. "It is

used to return people who have been transfigured or cursed to their original state."

"Excellent. Ten points to Gryffindor," said Professor Sprout. "The Mandrake forms an essential part of most antidotes. It is also, however, dangerous. Who can tell me why?"

Hermione's hand narrowly missed Ron on the back of his head as it shot up again.

"The cry of the Mandrake is fatal to anyone who hears it," She said promptly.

"Precisely. Take another two points." Said Professor Sprout. "Now, the Mandrakes we have here are still very young."

She pointed to a row of deep trays as she spoke, and everyone shuffled forward for a better look. A hundred or so tufty little plants, purplish green in color, were growing there in rows. They looked quite remarkable to Harry, who didn't have the slightest idea what Hermione meant by the "cry" of the Mandrake.

"Everyone take a pair of earmuffs," said Professor Sprout.

There was a scramble as everyone tried to seize a pair that wasn't pink and fluffy after hearing the Potter's comment...

"THE ONE WHO GETS A PINK AND FLUFFY EARMUFF IS A PANSY PARKINSON!"

"All right now. Everyone when I tell you to put them on, make sure your ears are completely covered," said Professor Sprout. "When it is safe to remove them, I will give you the thumbs-up. Right--earmuffs on."

The twins snapped their earmuffs over their ears. They shut out sound completely. Professor Sprout put the pink, fluffy pair over her own ears, rolled up the sleeves of her robes, grasped one of the tufty plants firmly, and pulled hard.

Harry let out a gasp of surprise that no one could hear besides his twin sister.

Instead of roots, a small, muddy, and extremely ugly baby popped out of the earth. The leaves were growing right out of his head. He had pale green, mottled skin, and was clearly bawling at the top of his lungs.

Professor Sprout took a large plant pot from under the table and plunged the Mandrake into it, burying him in dark, damp compost until only the tufted leaves were visible. Professor Sprout dusted off her hands, gave them all the thumbs-up, and removed her own earmuffs.

"As our Mandrakes are only seedlings, their cries won't kill yet," she said calmly as though she'd just done nothing more exciting than water a begonia. "However, they will knock you out for several hours, and as I'm sure none of you want to miss your first day back, make sure your earmuffs are securely in place while you work. I will attract your attention when it is time to pack up.

Four to a tray--there is a large supply of pots here--compost in the sacks over there--and be careful of the Venemous Tentacula, it's teething."

Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione joined together at their tray, but on the other side of Ron was a curly-haired Hufflepuff boy the twins knew by sight but had never spoken to.

"Justin Finch-Fletchley," He told them brightly, shaking Harry by the hand. "Know who you two are of course, the Famous Harry and Hally Potter..."

And you're Hermione Granger--always top in everything next to them of course," (Hermione beamed as she had her hand shaken too) "--and Ron Weasley. Wasn't that your flying car?"

Ron didn't smile. The Howler was obviously still on his mind.

"That Lockhart's something though, isn't he?" said Justin happily as they all began filling their pots with dragon dung compost. "Awfully

brave chap. Have you read his books? I'd have died of fear if I'd been cornered in a telephone booth by a werewolf, but he stayed cool and -zap--just fantastic.

"My name was down for Eton, you know. I can't tell you how glad I am I came here instead. Of course, Mother was slightly disappointed, but since I made her read Lockhart's books I think she's begun to see how useful it'll be to have a fully trained wizard in the family..."

Hally heard enough of the ranting over Lockhart and leaned over Harry and Ron both.

"Finch-Fletchley, let me give you some info on Lockhart. He's a..."

"Ha!" Harry warned his sister giving her a stern look

"Conceited horses butt!" Hally simply said after noticing Harry's look of warning.

"He does act like that at times doesn't he?" Justin laughed suddenly, nodding his head in agreement.

After that they didn't have much chance to talk. Their earmuffs were back on and they needed to concentrate on the Mandrakes. Professor Sprout had made it look extremely easy, but it wasn't. The Mandrakes didn't like coming out of the earth, but didn't seem to want to go back into it either. They squirmed, kicked, flailed their sharp little fists, and gnashed their teeth. Harry spent ten whole minutes trying to squash a particularly fat one into a pot.

By the end of the class, the twins, like everyone else, were sweaty, aching, and covered in earth. Everyone traipsed back to the castle for a quick wash and then the Gryffindors hurried off to Transfiguration.

Professor McGonagall's classes were always hard work, but today was especially difficult except in Harry's case of course. Everything Harry had learned last year stayed with him, but it seemed that everything that Hally learned, seemed to have leaked out of her head during the summer. They were supposed to be turning a beetle into a button, but all Hally had managed to do was give her beetle a lot of

exercise as it scuttled over the desktop avoiding her wand until Harry had to refresh her memory.

Ron was having far worse problems. He had patched up his wand with some borrowed Spellotape, but it seemed to be damaged beyond repair. It kept crackling and sparking at odd moments, and every time Ron tried to transfigure his beetle it engulfed him in thick gray smoke that smelled of rotten eggs. Unable to see what he was doing, Ron accidentally squashed his beetle with his elbow and had to ask for a new one. Professor McGonagall wasn't pleased.

The twins were relieved to hear the lunch bell. Hally's brain felt like a wrung sponge. Everyone filed out of the classroom except for them and Ron, who was wracking his wand furiously on the desk.

"Stupid--useless--thing--"

"Write home for another one," Harry suggested as the wand let off a volley of bangs like a firecracker.

"Oh, yeah, and get another Howler back," said Ron, stuffing the now hissing wand into his bag. "It's your own fault your wand got snapped--"

Harry looked at his little sister just then, "And what is with you Hal? You're not in your usual concentration when it comes to Transfiguration. I've never seen you do this over the summer," Harry commented in concern

"I dunno Harry, It's like I'm...drained or something. Like I haven't learned any of this, but I have... I don't know what's wrong with me," Hally explained highly confused herself

They went down to lunch, where Ron's mood was not improved by Hermione's showing them the handful of perfect coat buttons she had produced in Transfiguration. Hermione then noticed the solemn look on Hally's face and quickly put her buttons away, not wanting make Hally feel any more upset than she already was.

"What've we got this afternoon?" Harry asked, hastily changing the subject.

"Defense Against the Dark Arts," Said Hermione at once. Sniggers erupted from the twins.

"Why?" demanded Ron, seizing her schedule, "have you outlined all Lockhart's lessons in little hearts?"

Hermione snatched the schedule back, blushing furiously.

"Would you be jealous if she did Ron?" Hally lashed out at the red-haired boy suddenly putting Ron in his place.

They finished lunch and went outside into the overcast courtyard. Hermione sat down on a stone step and buried her nose in *Voyages with Vampires* again. Harry, Hally and Ron stood talking about Quidditch for several minutes before both Harry and Hally became aware that they were being closely watched. Looking up, they saw the very small mousy-haired boy they'd seen trying on the Sorting Hat last night staring at them as though transfixed. He was clutching what looked like an ordinary Muggle camera, and the moment Harry and Hally looked at him, he went bright red.

"All right, Harry, Hally? I'm-I'm Colin Creevey," he said breathlessly, taking a tentative step forward. "I'm in Gryffindor, too. D'you think--would it be all right if--can I have a picture?" he said raising the camera hopefully.

"A picture?" Harry and Hally repeated blankly at the same time.

"So I can prove I've met you both," said Colin Creevey eagerly, edging further forward. "I know all about you. Everyone's told me. About how you survived when You-Know-Who tried to kill you two and how he disappeared and everything and how you two still got a lightening scar on your foreheads" (his eyes raked Harry's and Hally's hairline) "And a boy in my dormitory said if I develop the film in the right potion, the pictures'll move." Colin drew a great shuddering breath of excitement and said, "It's amazing here, isn't it? I never knew all the odd stuff I could do was magic till I got the letter from

Hogwarts. My dad's a milkman, he couldn't believe it either. So I'm taking loads of pictures to send home to him. And It'd be really good if I had one of you two" --he looked imploringly at Harry and Hally-- "Maybe your friend could take it and I could stand next to you both? And then, could you both sign it?"

"Signed photos? You're giving out signed photos, Potters?"

Loud and scathing, Draco Malfoy's voice echoed around the courtyard. He had stopped right in front of Colin, flanked, as he always was at Hogwarts, by his large and thuggish cronies, Crabbe and Goyle.

"Everyone line up!" Malfoy roared to the crowd. "The Potter's are giving out signed photos!"

"No, we're not!" Harry said angrily, his fists clenching. "Shut up, Malfoy."

"You're just jealous," Piped up Colin, whose entire body was about as thick as Crabbe's neck.

"Jealous?" Said Malfoy, who didn't need to shout anymore: half the courtyard was listening in. "Of what? I don't want foul scars right across my forehead, thanks. I don't think getting your head cut open makes you that special, myself."

Crabbe and Goyle were sniggering stupidly.

"Eat slugs Malfoy," Said Ron angrily. Crabbe stopped laughing and started rubbing his knuckles in a menacing way which quickly drew Hally's attention as she quickly stepped next to Ron, getting ready to fight back.

"Be careful Weasley," Sneered Malfoy. "You don't want to start any trouble or your Mommy'll have to come and take you away from school." He put on a shrill, piercing voice, "If you put another toe out of line'--"

A knot of Slytherin fifth-years nearby nearly laughed until they seen who it was, watching the scene. Draco looked Hally's way with a smirk.

"Weasley would like a signed photo, little Potter, " smirked Malfoy. "It'd be worth more than his family's whole house--"

"WHAM!" "Ouch! That had to hurt!" the knot of fifth-year Slytherins cackled out after witnessing Hally throwing a wallop of a punch to Draco Malfoy's jaw.

Ron had whipped his Spellotape wand out a second later after Hally threw the punch. Hermione shut her Voyages with Vampires with a snap and whispered, "Look out!"

"What's all this, what's all this?" Gilderoy Lockhart was striding toward them, his turquoise robes swirling behind him, and he still had the horses tail on his rear. "Who's giving out signed photos?"

Harry started to speak but he was cut short with his sister Hally as Lockhart flung his arms around their shoulders and thundered jovially, "Shouldn't have asked! We meet again Potters!"

Pinne to Lockhart's sides and burning with humiliation, Harry and Hally watched Malfoy's cronies go back into the crowd while Draco came to getting to his feet and smirked back into the crowd next.

"Come on then, Mr. Creevey," said Lockhart, beaming at Colin. "A double portrait, can't do better than that, and we'll all three sign it for you."

Colin fumbled for his camera and took the picture as the bell rang behind them, signaling the start of afternoon classes.

"Off you go, move along there," Lockhart called to the crowd, and he set off back to the castle with Harry and Hally, who was wishing they knew a good vanishing spell, still clamped to his sides.

"A word to the wise Harry and Hally," said Lockhart paternally as they entered the building through a side door. "I covered up for you two

back there with young Creevey--if he was photographing me, too, your schoolmates won't think you two were setting yourselves up so much..."

Deaf to Harry and Hally's stammers, Lockhart swept them down a corridor lined with staring students and up a staircase.

"Let me just say that handing out signed pictures at this stage of your career isn't sensible--looks a tad bigheaded, Potters, to be frank. There may well come a time when, like me, you'll need to keep a stack handy wherever you go, but"--he gave a little chortle--"I don't think your two are quite there yet."

They had reached Lockhart's classroom and he let Harry and Hally both go at last. They both yanked their robes straight and headed for a seat at the very back of the class, where they busied themselves with piling all seven of Lockhart's books in front of them, so that they could avoid looking at the real thing.

The rest of the class came clattering in, and Ron and Hermione sat down on either side of the twins.

"You could've fried an egg on your faces," Said Ron, "You two better hope Creevey doesn't meet Ginny, or they'll be starting a Harry and Hally Potter fan club."

"Shut up," Harry snapped at the red-haired boy. The last thing He and his sister needed was for Lockhart to hear the phrase, "Harry and Hally Potter fan club."

When the whole class was seated, Lockhart cleared his throat loudly and silence fell. He reached forward, picked up Neville Longbottom's copy of *Travels with Trolls*, and held it up to show his own, winking portrait on the front.

"Me," he said, pointing at it and winking as well. "Gilderoy Lockhart, Order of Merlin, Third class, Honorary Member of the Dark Force Defense League, and five-time winner of Witch Weekly's Most-Charming-Smile Award--but I don't talk about that. I didn't get rid of the Bandon Banshee by smiling at her!"

He waited for them to laugh; a few people smiled at him weakly.

"I see you've all bought a complete set of my books--well done. I thought we'd start today with a little quiz. Nothing to worry about--just to check how well you've read them, how much you've taken in--"

When he had handed out the test papers he returned to the front of the class and said, "You have thirty minutes--start--now!"

Harry and Hally looked down at their papers and read:

1. What is Gilderoy lockhart's favorite color?
2. What is Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition?
3. What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart's greatest achievement to date?

On and on it went, over three sides of paper, right down to:

54. When is Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday, and what would his ideal gift be?

Harry looked at his sister Hally, "He's joking right?" he whispered

"Afraid not...follow my lead here big brother, and just put down what comes in your mind," Hally sniggered quietly

Harry grinned slowly before writing whatever came into his head to put down on each question.

Half an hour later, Lockhart collected the papers and rifled through them in front of the class.

"Tut, tut--hardly any of you remembered that my favorite color is lilac. I say so in Year with the Yeti. And a few of you need to read Wanderings with Werewoves more carefully--I clearly state in chapter twelve that my ideal birthday gift would be harmony between all

magic and non-magic people--though I wouldn't say no to a large bottle of Ogden's Old Firewhisky!"

He gave them another roguish wink. Ron was now staring at Lockhart with an expression of disbelief on his face; Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas, who were sitting in front, were shaking with silent laughter, Hermione on the other hand, was listening to Lockhart with rapt attention and gave a start when he mentioned her name.

"...But Miss Hermione Granger knew my secret ambition is to rid the world of evil and market my own range of hair-care potions--good girl! in fact--he flipped her paper over--"full marks! Where is Miss Hermione Granger?"

Hermione raised a trembling hand.

"Excellent!" Beamed Lockhart. "Quite excellent! take ten points for Gryffindor! And so--to business..."

He looked over at the twins who sat in their chairs with the looks of innocence.

"My greatest achievement was never falling in love with an ogre nor swooning over being cuddled by a troll---well to business," Lockhart announced turning his back to the classroom, showing his horses tail that was still being unnoticed by him.

An eruption of sheer hysterical laughter filtered throughout the classroom. Lockhart looked around the room, trying to figure out what was so humorous before shrugging his shoulders and continuing.

He bent down behind his desk and lifted a large, covered cage onto it.

"Now--be warned! It is my job to arm you against the foulest creatures known to the wizardkind! You may find yourselves facing your worst fears in this room. Know only that no harm can befall you whilst I am here. All I ask is that you remain calm."

In spite of himself, Harry and Hally leaned around their pile of books for a better look at the cage. Lockhart placed a hand on the cover.

Dean and Seamus had stopped laughing now. Neville was cowering in his front row seat.

"I must ask you not to scream," said Lockhart in a low voice. "It might provoke them."

As the whole class held its breath, Lockhart whipped off the cover.

"Yes," he said dramatically. "Freshly caught Cornish pixies."

Seamus Finnigan couldn't help himself. He let out a snort of laughter that even Lockhart couldn't mistake for a scream of terror.

"Yes," He smiled at Seamus.

"Well, they're not--they're not very--dangerous, are they?" Seamus choked.

"Don't be so sure!" Said Lockhart, wagging a finger annoyingly at Seamus. "Devilish tricky little blighters they can be!"

The pixies were electric blue and about eight inches high, with pointed faces and voices so shrill it was like listening to a lot of budgies arguing. The moment the cover had been removed, they had started jabbering and rocketing around, rattling the bars and making bizarre faces at the people nearest them.

"Right, then," Lockhart said loudly. "Let's see what you make of them!" And he opened the cage.

It was pandemonium. The pixies shot in every direction like rockets. Two of them seized Neville by the ears and lifted him into the air. Several shot straight through the window, showering the back row with broken glass. The rest proceeded to wreck the classroom more effectively than a rampaging rhino. They grabbed ink bottles and sprayed the class with them, shredded books and papers, tore pictures from the walls, up-ended the waste basket, grabbed bags and books and threw them out of the smashed window; within minutes, half the class was sheltering under desks and Neville was swinging from the iron chandelier in the ceiling.

"Come on now--round them up, round them up, they're only pixies," Lockhart shouted.

He rolled out his sleeves, brandishing his wand, and bellowed, "Peskipiksi Pesternomi!"

It had absolutely no effect; one of the pixies seized his wand and threw it out of the window, too. Lockhart gulped and dived under his own desk, narrowly avoiding being squashed by Neville, who fell a second later as the chandelier gave way.

The bell rang and there was a mad rush toward the exit. In the relative calm that followed, Lockhart straightened up, caught sight of Harry, Hally, Ron, and Hermione, who were almost at the door, and said, "Well, I'll ask you four to just nip the rest of them back into their cage." He swept out past them and shut the door quickly behind him.

"YOU GREAT BIG FRAUD!" Hally bellowed out at him just then.

"Can you believe him?" Roared Ron as one of the remaining pixies bit him painfully on the ear.

"He just wants to give us some hands-on experience," Hermione said, immobilizing two pixies at once with a clever Freezing Charm and stuffing them into their cage.

"Hands on?" the twins said, trying to grab two pixies dancing out of their reach with their tongues out.

"Hermione, he didn't have a clue on what he was doing--,"

"Rubbish," Said Hermione. "You've read his books--look at all those amazing things he's done--"

"He says he's done," Ron muttered

The twins agreed to Ron's statement at that moment.

A/N: That is all for chapter 17 see you in chapter 18 bye for now.

Chapter 18 MUDBLOODS, MURMURS, AND GILDEROY'S BAD DAY

Harry and Hally spent a lot of time over the next few days dodging out of sight whenever they seen Gilderoy Lockhart coming down a corridor. Harder for them to avoid was Colin Creevey, who seemed to have memorized the twin's schedules. Nothing seemed to give Colin a bigger thrill than to say, "All right, Harry, Hally?" six or seven times a day and hear, "Hello, Colin," back, however exasperated the twins sounded when they said it.

Hedwig and Eros were still angry with the twins about the disastrous car journey and Ron's wand was still malfunctioning, surpassing itself on Friday morning by shooting out of Ron's hand in Charms and hitting tiny old Professor Flitwick squarely between the eyes, creating a large, throbbing green boil where it had stuck. So with one thing and another, the twins were quite glad to reach the weekend. They, Ron and Hermione were planning to visit Hagrid on Saturday morning. The twins, however, was shaken awake several hours earlier than they would have like by Oliver Wood, Captain of Gryffindor Quidditch team and by Alicia Spinnet, one of Hally's fellow Chasers.

Harry opened his eyes, looking up at Oliver Wood, "Whassamatter?" Harry said groggily.

"Quidditch practice!" said Wood. "Come on!"

Inside Hally's dorm, Hally opened her eyes to find Alicia looking down at her. "Um...Alicia..."

"Time for Quidditch Practice Hally. Come on." Alicia grinned at her

From both of their dorms, Harry and Hally squinted their eyes at their windows. There was a thin mist hanging across the pink-and-gold sky. Now that they were awake, they couldn't understand how they could have slept through the racket the birds were making.

"Oliver," Harry croaked, "It's the crack of dawn."

“Exactly,” Said Wood. He was a tall and burly sixth year and, at the moment, his eyes were gleaming with a crazed enthusiasm. “It’s part of our new training program. Come on, grab your broom, and let’s go.” Said Wood heartily. “None of the other teams have started training yet; we’re going to be first off the mark this year...”

Yawning and shivering slightly, Harry climbed out of bed and tried to find his Quidditch robes.

“Is Wood insane or something?” Hally questioned Alicia, sitting up in her bed, and stretching her arms. “It’s the crack of dawn, and no one is up yet...”

“Exactly why Wood is having us in a new training program.” Alicia explained while Hally got up out of bed. “No other team has done this and he wants us to be first off the mark this year.”

Hally opened her trunk, searching for her Quidditch robes while muttering under her breath, and then heard Wood outside of her dorms.

“Good man,” Said Wood. “Meet you on the field in fifteen minutes...Hally the same to you too girl.” Wood called out to Hally before heading down the stairs.

When they’d found their scarlet team robes and pulled on their cloaks for warmth, Harry had scribbled a note to Ron and Hermione explaining where he and his twin sister were gone to and went down the spiral staircase to the common room, their Nimbus Two Thousands on their shoulders. They had just reached the portrait hole when there was a clatter behind them and Colin Creevey came dashing down the spiral staircase, his camera swinging madly around his neck and something clutched in his hand.

“I heard someone saying your names on the stairs, Harry, Hally! Look what I’ve got here! I’ve had it developed, I wanted to show you two...”

The twins looked bemusedly at the photograph Colin was brandishing under their nose.

A moving, black-and-white Lockhart was tugging hard on each arm that Harry and Hally recognized as their own. They were pleased to see that their photographic self was putting up a fight and refusing to be dragged into view. As Harry and Hally watched, Lockhart gave up and slumped, panting, against the white edge of the picture.

“Will you two sign it?” Colin said eagerly.

“No,” Harry and Hally both answered simultaneously, glancing around to check that the room was deserted. “Sorry Colin, we’re in a hurry—Quidditch Practice...”

They climbed through the portrait hole.

“Oh, wow! Wait for me! I’ve never watched a Quidditch game before!”

Colin scrambled out through the hole after them.

“He’s not taking the hint,” Hally whispered to her brother

Harry glanced over his shoulder at Colin, “It’ll be really boring,” Harry told the mousy-looking boy quickly, but Colin ignored him, his face shining with excitement.

“You were the youngest House players in a hundred years, weren’t you two Harry?” Said Colin, trotting alongside them. “You two must be brilliant. I’ve never flown. Is it easy? Is that your own brooms? Is that the best one there is?”

Both Harry and Hally didn’t know how to get rid of him. It was like having an extremely talkative shadow.

“I don’t really understand Quidditch,” said Colin breathlessly. “Is it true there are four balls? And two of them fly around trying to knock people off their brooms?”

“yes,” Harry said heavily, resigned to explain the complicated rules of Quidditch. “They’re called Bludgers. There are two Beaters on each team who carry clubs to beat the Bludgers away from their side. Fred

and George Weasley are the Gryffindor Beaters.”

“And what are the other balls for?” Colin asked, tripping down a couple of steps because he was gazing open-mouthed at the twins. Hally let out a quiet groan, shaking her head in misery.

“Well, the Quaffle—that’s the biggish red one—is the one that scores goals. Three Chasers on each team throw the Quaffle to each other and try and get it through the goal posts at the end of the pitch—they’re three long poles with hoops on the end.”

“And the fourth ball...”

“...Is the Golden Snitch,” Said Harry, “And it’s very small, very fast, and difficult to catch. But that’s what the Seeker’s got to do, because a game of Quidditch doesn’t end until the Snitch earns his team an extra hundred and fifty points.”

"And you're the Gryffindor Seeker aren't you?" said Colin in awe

"Yes," said Harry as they left the castle and started across the dew-drenched grass. "And there's the Keeper, too. He guards the goal posts. that's it, really."

But Colin didn't stop questioning Harry all the way down the sloping lawns to the Quidditch field, and the twins only shook him off when they reached the changing rooms; Colin called after them in a piping voice, "I'll go and get a good seat you two!" and hurried off to the stands.

The rest of the Gryffindor team were already in the changing room. Wood along with Alicia was the only two who looked truly awake. Fred and George Weasley were sitting, puffy-eyed and tousle-haired. The other Chaser Katie Bell, was yawning side by side opposite them.

"There you two are, Harry and Hally, what kept you two?" said Wood briskly. "Now I wanted a quick talk with you all before we actually get onto the field, because I spent the summer devising a whole new training program, which think will make all the difference..."

Wood was holding up a large diagram of a Quidditch field, on which were drawn many lines, arrows, and crosses in different colored inks. He took out his wand, tapped the board, and the arrows began to wiggle over the diagram like caterpillars. As Wood launched into a speech about his new tactics, Fred Weasley's head drooped right onto Alicia Spinnet's shoulder and he began to snore.

The first board took nearly twenty minutes to explain, but there was another board under that and third under that one. Harry and Hally sank into a stupor as Wood droned on and on.

"So," said Wood, at long last, jerking the twins from a wistful fantasy about what they could be eating for breakfast at this very moment up at the castle. "is that clear? Any questions?"

"I've got a question, Oliver," Said George, who had woken with a start. "Why couldn't you have told us all this yesterday when we were awake?"

Wood wasn't pleased.

"Now, listen here, you lot," he said, glowering at them all. "We should have won the Quidditch cup last year. We're easily the best team. But unfortunately--owing ot circumstances beyond our conrol--'

The twins guiltily shifted in their seats. They had been unconscious in the hospital wing for the final match of the previous year, meaning that Gryffindor had been a player short and had suffered their worst defeat in three hundred years.

Wood took a moment to regain control of himself. Their last defeat was clearly still torturing him.

"So this year, we train harder than ever before...Okay, let's go and put our new theories into practice!" Wood shouted, seizing his broomstick and leading the way out of the locker rooms. Stiff-legged and still yawning, his team followed.

They had been in the locker room so long that the sun was up completely now, although remnants of mist hung over the grass in the stadium. As the twins walked onto the field, they saw Ron and Hermione sitting in the stands.

"Aren't you two finished yet?" Called Ron incredulously

"Haven't even started," Said the twins at one time, looking jealously at the toast and marmalade Ron and Hermione had brought out of the Great Hall. "Wood's been teaching us some new moves."

They mounted their broomsticks and kicked at the ground, soaring up into the air. The cool morning air whipped their faces, waking them far more effectively than Wood's long talk. It felt wonderful to be back on the Quidditch field. They soared right around the stadium at full speed, racing Fred and George.

"What's that funny clicking noise?" called Fred as they hurtled around the corner.

The twins looked into the stands. Colin was sitting in one of the highest seats, his camera raised, taking picture after picture, the sound strangely magnified in the deserted stadium.

"Look this way Harry and Hally! This way!" he cried shrilly

"Who's that?" Fred asked

"No idea," both twins lied, putting on a spurt of speed that took them as far away as possible from Colin.

"What's going on?" said Wood, frowning, as he skimmed through the air toward them. "Why's that first year taking pictures? I don't like it. He could be a Slytherin spy, trying to find out about our new training program."

"He's in Gryffindor," said Harry and Hally quickly.

"And Slytherins don't need a spy, Oliver," said George.

"What makes you say that?" said Wood testily.

"Because they're here in person," said George, pointing.

Several people in green robes were walking onto the field, broomsticks in their hands.

"I don't believe it!" Wood hissed in outrage. "I booked the field for today! We'll see about this!"

Wood shot toward the ground, landing harder than he meant to in his anger, staggering slightly as he dismounted. Harry, Hally, Fred and George followed.

"Flint!" Wood bellowed at the Slytherin Captain. "This is out practice time! We got up specially! You can clear off now!"

Marcus Flint was even larger than Wood. He had a look of trollish cunning on his face as he replied, "Plenty of room for all of us, Wood."

Angelina and Alicia had come over, too. There was no girls on the Slytherin team, who stood shoulder to shoulder, facing the Gryffindors, leering to a man.

"But I booked the field!" said Wood, positively spitting with rage. "I booked it!"

"Ah," said Flint. "But I've got a specially signed note here from Professor Snape. "I, Professor S. Snape, give the Slytherin team permission to practice today on the Quidditch field owing to the need to train their new Seeker."

"You've got a new Seeker?" said Wood, distracted. "Where?"

And from behind the six large figures before them came a seventh, smaller boy, smirking all over his pale, pointed face. It was Draco Malfoy.

"Aren't you Lucius Malfoy's son?" said Fred feigning as though he did not know the boy, and looking at him with dislike.

"Funny you should mention Draco's father," said Flint as the whole Slytherin team smiled still more broadly. "Let me show you the generous gift he's made to the Slytherin team."

All seven of them held out their broomsticks. Seven highly polished, brand-new handles, and seven sets of fine gold lettering spelling the words Nimbus Two Thousand and One gleamed under the morning sun.

Hally looked up at her Slytherin friend as though she had never known him for the first time in her life, "Flint, please tell me that you didn't accept those as a bribe," she requested. Flint nor Etre could look Hally in the eyes.

"Very latest model. Only came out last month," said Flint carelessly, ignoring Hally's words, and flicking a speck of dust from the end of his own. "I believe it outstrips the old Two Thousand series by a considerable amount. As for the Cleansweeps'-- he smiled nastily at Fred and George, who were both clutching Cleansweep Fives-- "sweeps the board with them."

None of the Gryffindor team could think of anything to say for a moment. Malfoy was smirking so broadly his cold eyes were reduced to slits.

"Oh, look," said Flint. "A field invasion."

Ron and Hermione were crossing the grass to see what was going on.

"What's happening?" Ron asked Harry. "Why aren't you playing? And what's he doing here?"

He was looking at Malfoy, taking in his Slytherin Quidditch robes.

"I'm the new Slytherin Seeker, Weasley," said Draco Malfoy, smugly. "Everyone's just been admiring the brooms my father's bought our team."

Ron gaped, open-mouthed, at the seven superb broomsticks in front of him.

"Good, aren't they?" Said Draco Malfoy smoothly. "But perhaps the Gryffindor team will be able to raise some gold and get new brooms, too. You could raffle off those Cleansweep Fives; I expect a museum would bid for them."

The Slytherin team howled with laughter. Hally glared at Draco before facing Flint once more.

"What the heck is wrong with you Flint!" Hally demanded in anger

"Nothing is wrong with me Lady Hex. What's wrong with you?" Flint threw her demand back at her, noticing her eyes flinching slightly. "Now Lady Hex..."

"Don't talk to me Flint. I now know who my friends truly are," Hally seethed

"It's not what you think Lady Hex..." "Oh and what would that be?" Hally questioned him stiffly

"Now you know as well as we that we have to keep our appearances up for the rest of the school's sake, don't think that I'm actually being mean out of spite," Flint told her

"Well it's a rotten thing to do, letting him sneer at Ron like that..."

"Over what little Potter? Those ancient brooms? I'm sure that they could be put on display inside a museum for the younger students to see what we've accomplished from those things," Draco Malfoy smirked at her

"At least no one on the Gryffindor team had to buy their way in," Said Hermione sharply. "They got in on pure talent."

Harry covered his mouth sniggering while Hally snapped her head Hermione's way. "Hermione Granger!" Hally exclaimed in surprise

The smug look on Malfoy's face flickered.

"No one asked for your opinion, you filthy little MudBlood," He spat.

Harry knew at once that Malfoy had said something really bad because there was an instant uproar at his words from his little twin sister, who was only standing half a foot in front of the platinum-blond-boy. Flint had to dive in front of Malfoy to stop Fred and George jumping on him, Alicia shrieked, "HOW DARE YOU!", and Ron plunged his hand into his robes, pulled out his wand, yelling, "You'll pay for that one, Malfoy!" and pointed it furiously under Flint's arm at Malfoy's face.

Hally rolled her eyes upwards after hearing Ron yelling out until she noticed the red-haired boy's wand, "Whoa! Look out!"

A loud bang echoed around the stadium just as Hally jerked Flint out of the way just in the nick of time, a jet of green light shot out of the wrong end of Ron's wand, hitting him in the stomach and sending him reeling backward onto the grass.

The twins stood next to Flint, Hally rolling her eyes at Ron and Harry laughing without being heard from the others. "What an idiot," Hally sighed, shaking her head at the red-haired boy.

"Ron! Ron! Are you all right?" Squealed Hermione.

Ron opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. Instead he gave an almighty belch and several slugs dribbled out of his mouth onto his lap.

"EWWW!" Hally wrinkled her nose up like a tiny mouse over the scene while Harry shuddered at the sight in disgust.

"Bet that doesn't taste any good, does it Ron?" Hally cracked out, trying to keep from laughing.

The Slytherin team, however, were paralyzed with laughter. Flint was doubled up, hanging onto his new broomstick for support. Malfoy was

on all fours, banging the ground with his fist. The Gryffindors were gathered around Ron, who kept belching large, glistening slugs. Nobody seemed to want to touch him.

"We'd better get him to Hagrid's, it's nearest," said Harry to Hally and Hermione. Hally let out a couple of giggles before nodding in agreement and Hermione could only nod bravely; the three of them pulled Ron up by his arms.

"What happened Harry? What happened Hally? is he ill? But you can cure him, can't you?" Colin had run down from his seat and was now dancing alongside them as they left the field. Ron gave a huge heave and more slugs dribbled down his front.

"Oooh," said Colin, fascinated and raising his camera. "Can you hold him still Harry and Hally?"

"Get out of the way, Colin!" The twins said angrily. The two and Hermione supported Ron out of the stadium and across the grounds toward the edge of the forest.

"Nearly there, Ron," said Hermione as the gamekeeper's cabin came into view. "You'll be all right in a minute--almost there--"

They were within twenty feet of Hagrid's house when the front door opened, but it wasn't Hagrid who emerged. Gilderoy Lockhart, wearing robes of palest mauve today, came striding out.

"Oh just great," Hally blurted out to them

"Quick, behind here," Harry hissed, dragging Ron behind a nearby bush. Hally and Hermione both followed him, Hermione moving somewhat reluctantly.

"It's a simple matter if you know what you're doing!" Lockhart was saying loudly to Hagrid. "if you need help, you know where I am! I'll let you have a copy of my book. I'm surprised you haven't already got one--I'll sign one tonight and send it over. Well, good-bye!" And he strode away toward the castle.

"I can't stand that conceited fraud," Hally hissed in low-key until she got an idea by reaching into the pocket of her robe and pulling out her pet doxie.

Hermione looked at her as though she was mad while Ron could only watch her and trying to keep from belching. Harry started to grin evilly catching on,

"Sick Splinter on him Hal, give him one for me too while your at it," Harry sniggered.

Hally whispered to her doxie, telling him what she wanted done before letting him loose, and seeing him fly right after Gilderoy Lockhart giggling in tiny squeaks.

"Dad and the other Professor's will catch on when they see Splinter. Now to take care of Ron here," Hally giggled

They waited until Lockhart was out of sight, then pulled Ron out of the bush and up to Hagrid's front door. They knocked urgently.

Hagrid appeared at once, looking very grumpy, but his expression brightened when he seen who it was.

"Bin wonderin' when you'd come ter see me--come in, come in--thought you mighta bin Professor Lockhart back again--"

Harry, Hally, and Hermione supported Ron over the threshold into the one-roomed cabin, which had an enormous bed in one corner, a fire crackling merrily in the other. Hagrid didn't seem perturbed by Ron's slug problem. Which Harry and Hally hastily explained as he lowered Ron into a chair.

"Better out than in," he said cheerfully, plunking a large copper basin in front of him. "Get 'em all up, Ron."

"I don't think there's anything to do except wait for it to stop," said Hermione anxiously, watching Ron bend over the basin. "That's a diffilcult curse to work at the best of times, but with a broken wand--"

Hagrid was bustling around making them tea. His boarhound, Fang, was slobbering over Harry and Hally both.

"What did Lockhart want with you, Hagrid" both twins asked while they each scratched Fang's ears.

"Givin' me advice on gettin' kelpies out of a well," growled Hagrid, moving a half-plucked rooster off his scrubbed table and setting down the teapot. "Like I don't know. An' bangin' on about some banshee he banished. If one word of it was true, I'll eat my kettle."

Hally lifted her head up at the half-giant beaming, "Finally, at least someone knows that he's a great big fraud!" Hally blurted out

Hagrid turned to look at her for a brief second. He was just about to make a comment before waving it off with a toothy grin.

It was most unlike Hagrid to criticize a Hogwarts' teacher, and the twins looked at him in surprise. Hermione, however, said in a voice somewhat higher than usual, "I think you're being a bit unfair. Professor Dumbledore obviously thought he was the best man for the job--"

"He was the on'y man for the job," said Hagrid, offering them a plate of treacle fudge, while Ron coughed squechily into his basin. "An' I mean the on'y one. Gettin' very difficult ter take it on, see. They're startin' ter think it's jinxed. No one's lasted long fer a while now. So tell me," said Hagrid, jerking his head at Ron. "Who was he tryin' ter curse?"

Malfoy called Hermione something--it must've been really bad, because everyone went wild."

"It was bad," said Ron hoarsely, emerging over the tabletop looking pale and sweaty. "Malfoy called her 'Mudblood' Hagrid--"

Ron dived out of sight again as a fresh wave of slugs made their appearance. Hagrid looked outraged.

"He didn'!" Hagrid growled at Hermione

"He did Hagrid. I heard him myself, it made the whole Gryffindor team angry over it." Hally verified, looking over at Hermione in silent sympathy.

Hagrid looked at Hermione quietly, "He did." she said at last. "But I don't know what it means. I could tell it was really rude, of course--"

"He called you dirty blood Mione, and he meant every word he said!" Hally exclaimed heatedly

"Hally," Hagrid called out to the raven-red-streak-haired girl, calming her down before looking at Harry and Hermione both, considering whether or not that they should know.

"It's about the most insulting thing he could think of," Gaspd Ron coming back up. "Mudblood's a really foul name for someone who is Muggle-born--you know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards--like Malfoy's family--who think they're better than everyone else because they're what people call pure-blood."

He gave a small burp, and a single slug fell into his outstretched hand. He threw it into the basin and continued, "I mean, the rest of us know it doesn't make any difference at all. Look at Neville Longbottom--he's pure-blood and he can hardly stand a cauldron the right way up."

"An' they haven't invented a spell our Hermione can' do," said Hagrid proudly, making Hermione go a brilliant shade of magenta.

"It's a disgusting thing to call someone," said Ron, wiping his sweaty brow with a shaking hand. "Dirty blood, see. Common blood. It's ridiculous. Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway. If we hadn't married Muggles we'd've died out."

He retched and ducked out of sight again.

"Well I don' blame yeh fer tryin' ter curse him, Ron," said Hagrid loudly over the thuds of more slugs hitting the basin. "Bu' maybe it was a good thing yer wand backfired. 'Spect Lucius Malfoy would've

come marchin' up ter school if yeh'd cursed his son. Least yer not in trouble."

Both twins would have pointed out that trouble didn't come much worse than having slugs pouring out of your mouth, but they couldn't; Hagrid's treacle fudge had cemented their jaws together.

"Harry, Hally," said Hagrid abruptly as though struck by a sudden thought. "Gotta bone teh pick with yeh's . I've heard you two bin givin' out signed photos. How come I haven't got one?"

Furious, Harry and Hally wrenched their teeth apart.

"We have not been giving out signed photos," Harry said hotly, "If Lockhart's still spreading that around--"

But then they saw that Hagrid was laughing.

"I'm on'y jokin'," he told them, patting both twins on the back and sending them face first into the table. "I knew yeh two hadn't really. I told Loskhart yeh's didn' need teh. Yer more famous than him without tryin'."

"Bet he didn't like that," Said Harry, sitting up with his sister as they rubbed thier chins.

"Don' think he did," said Hagrid, his eyes twinkling. "AN' then I told him I'd never read one o' his books an' he decided ter go. Treacle fudge, Ron?" he added as Ron reappeared.

"No thanks," said Ron weakly. "Better not risk it."

"Come an' see what I've bin growin'", Said Hagrid as Harry, Hally and Hermione finished the last of their tea.

In the small vegetable patch behind Hagrid's house were a dozen of the largest pumpkins the twins had ever seen. Each was the size of a large boulder.

"Gettin' on well, aren't they?" said Hagrid happily. "Fer the Halloween feast...should be big enough by then."

"What've you been feeding them?" said Harry and Hally.

Hagrid looked over his shoulder to check that they were alone.

"Well I've bin givin' them--you know--a bit o' help--"

The twins noticed Hagrid's flowery pink umbrella leaning against the back wall of the cabin. They both had had reason to believe before now that this umbrella was not all it looked; in fact, Harry had the strong impression that Hagrid's old school wand was concealed inside it. Hagrid wasn't supposed to do magic. He had been expelled from Hogwarts in his third year, but Harry nor Hally had never found out why--any mention of the matter and Hagrid would clear his throat loudly and become mysteriously deaf until the subject was changed.

"An engorgement Charm, I suppose?" said Hermione, halfway between disapproval and amusement. "Well, you've done a good job on them."

"That's what yer little sister said," said Hagrid, nodding at Ron. "Met her jus' yesterday." Hagrid looked sideways at Harry, his beard twitching. "Said she was jus' lookin' round the grounds, but I reckon she was hopin' she might run inter someone else at my house." He winked at Harry. "If yeh ask me, she wouldn't say no ter a signed--"

"Oh shut up," said Harry. Ron snorted with laughter and the ground was sprayed with slugs. Hally hid her face quickly, sniggering inside her robes quietly.

"Watch it!" Hagrid roared, pulling Ron away from his precious Pumpkins.

It was nearly lunchtime and as Harry and Hally had only had on bit of treacle fudge since dawn, they was keen to go back up to the castle to eat. They said good-bye to Hagrid and walked back up to the castle, Ron hiccoughing occasionally, but only bringing up two very small slugs.

They had barely set foot in the cool entrance hall when a voice rang out, "There you three are, Potters--Weasley." Professor McGonagall was walking toward them, looking stern. "You three will do your detention this evening."

"What're we doing Professor?" Ron said nervously suppressing a burp.

"You will be polishing the silver in the trophy room with Mr. Filch," said Professor McGonagall. "And no magic, Weasley--elbow grease."

Ron gulped. Argus Filch, the caretaker, was loathed by every student in the school.

"And as for you two, Potters, will be helping Professor Lockhart answer his fan mail," Said Professor McGonagall.

"Oh n--Professor, can't i go and do the trophy room, too?" Harry asked desperately

Hally looked at her brother with wide eyes, "Oh no you don't! Your not leaving me with that...fraud..." Hally noticed Severus walking towards them.

"Dad, I'll scrub all of your cauldrons tonight, just please don't make me serve detention with Lockhart please?" Hally begged the potions master

Severus stopped in his tracks, looking down at Hally and smirked. "Sorry Raven, but that is where you will be...good luck young lady," he told her continuing on his way.

"Oh man..." "Mr. Potter, certainly not," Professor McGonagall said raising her eyebrows. "Professor Lockhart requested the two of you particularly. Eight o' clock sharp, all three of you."

Harry, Hally, and Ron slouched into the Great Hall in states of deepest gloom, Hermione behind them, wearing a well-you-did-break-school-rules sort of expression. The twins didn't enjoy their

shepherd's pie as much as they'd thought. Harry, Hally and Ron felt they'd got the worse deal.

"Filch'll have me there all night," said Ron heavily. "No magic! There must be about a hundred cups in that room. I'm no good at Muggle cleaning."

"We'd swap anytime," the twins stated hollowly.

"I've had loads of practice with the Dursley's. Answering Lockhart's fan mail...he'll be a nightmare..."

"What do you mean will be? He already is...and speaking of Lockhart, it looks like Splinter is getting ready to make his strike right about now," Hally grinned evilly, resting her hand under her chin and watching the scene.

Lockhart had just sat down for lunch, rubbing his hands together with eagerness. Severus, who sat at the right of Lockhart, noticed something flying around the new Defense Against The Dark Arts Professor's head, looking up, and realizing that it was his own daughter's pet doxie. Severus rested his head on his right hand, watching the scene take place with the look of amusement. Professor McGonagall took a slight glance above Lockhart's head, then looked back again. Her mouth gaped open in sheer surprise until she noticed Severus looking amused, figuring it out that Hally has something to do with the doxie. Dumbledore only looked to his plate, gleaming knowingly.

The doxie let out a wee tiny giggle before buzzing past Lockhart's left ear, making him box it with his own hand. "Ouch...what? humph," Lockhart shrugged his shoulders and continuing to eat once more while McGonagall covered her mouth silencing a fit of giggles while Severus's mouth twitched into a quick grin before containing his mask once more. Splinter then landed onto Lockhart's nose, looking at the Dark Arts Professor intently.

"CLINK!" "A doxie!" Lockhart exclaimed, his eyes looking cross sided as he continued to look at the tiny blue creature. Then the oddest scene came before them as they watched Splinter turn his back to

Lockhart, shaking its tiny rear end at him. Lockhart raised his hand to take out the tiny doxie...

"WHABAM!" "Thud!" Severus looked down behind him seeing Lockhart unconscious after knocking his own self out with his own hands. Splinter quickly made a beeline for Hally, as she opened her pocket without being seen, letting the doxie land before closing her school robes once more. The whole Gryffindor table were in hysterical laughter over witnessing Lockhart knocking himself out as well as the Slytherins.

"Shall we tell him who the doxie belongs to?" McGonagall enquired with a smile on her face.

"Not a chance Minerva, This is the best day I've had in years," Severus answered and turned around to finish his lunch.

Sunday afternoon seemed to melt away, and in what seemed like no time, it was five minutes to eight, and Harry along with his sister were dragging their feet along the second-floor corridor to Lockhart's office. They gritted their teeth and knocked.

The door flew open, Lockhart with a huge black and blue eye, beamed down at the two.

"Ah, here's the scalawag's!" he said. Come in, Harry, Hally, come in--"

Shining brightly on the walls by the light of many candles were countless framed photographs of Lockhart. He had even signed a few of them. Another large pile lay on his desk.

"You two can address the envelopes!" Lockhart told Harry and Hally, as though this was a huge treat. "This first one's to Gladys Gudgeon, bless her--huge fan of mine--"

The minutes snailed by. Harry and Hally let Lockhart's voice wash over them occasionally saying, "Mmm" and "Right" and "Yeah". Now and then he caught a phrase like, "Fame's a fickle friend Harry and Hally," or "Celebrity is as celebrity does, remember that."

'Can we say I'm going to puke yet?' Hally thought the question to her brother

'Just let it go Hal, he's obviously in love with himself,' Harry thought back to her as they continued on with their detention.

The candles burned lower and lower, making the light dance over the many moving faces of Lockhart watching them. Harry and Hally moved their aching hands over what felt like their thousandth envelope, with Harry writing out Veronica Smethley's address. It must be nearly time to leave the twins thought miserably, please let it be nearly time...

And then they heard something--something quite apart from the spitting of the dying candles and Lockhart's prattle about his fans.

It was a voice, a voice to chill the bone marrow, a voice of breathtaking, ice-cold venom.

"Come...come to me...Let me rip you...Let me tear you...Let me kill you..."

Harry and Hally gave a huge jump and a large lilac blot appeared on Veronica Smeathley's street.

"What?" they said loudly.

"I know!" Said Lockhart. "Six solid months at the top of the best-seller list! Broke all records!"

"No," said the twins frantically. "That voice!"

"Sorry?" said Lockhart, looking puzzled. "What voice?"

"That--that voice that said--didn't you hear it?"

Lockhart was looking at Harry and Hally in high astonishment.

"What are you talking about, you two? Perhaps your both getting a little drowsy? Great Scott--look at the time! We've been here nearly four hours! I'd never have believed it--the time's flown, hasn't it?"

Harry nor Hally answered. They was straining their ears to hear the voice again, but there was no sound now except for Lockhart telling them they mustn't expect a treat like this every time they got detention. Feeling dazed, Harry and Hally left.

It was so late that the Gryffindor common room was almost empty. The twins went straight to their dormitory, inside Harry's dorm; Ron wasn't back yet. Harry pulled on his pajamas, got into bed, and waited until he couldn't take it anymore and headed back down to the common room finding his twin already there, sitting down on one of the sofas. Harry sat down next to her, letting Hally lay her head onto his shoulder. Half an hour later, Ron arrived, nursing his right arm and bringing a strong smell of polish into the darken room.

"My muscles have all seized up," he groaned, sinking into a chair. "Fourteen times he made me buff up that Quidditch cup before he was satisfied. And then I had another slug attack all over a Special Award for Services to the school. Took ages to get the slime of...How was it with Lockhart you two?"

Keeping their voices low so as not to wake the rest of their house; They told Ron exactly what they had heard.

"And Lockhart said he couldn't hear it?" Ron asked them. The twins could see Ron frowning in the fireglow from the fireplace. "D'you think he was lying? But I don't get it--even someone invisible would've had to open the door."

"We know," The twins said, leaning back on the sofa and staring into the crackling fire. "We don't get it either."

A/N: That is all for chapter 18. See you in chapter 19 bye for now.

Chapter 19 THE DEATHDAY PARTY

"We know," the twins said, leaning back on the sofa and staring into the crackling fire. "We don't get it either..."

October arrived, spreading a damp chill over the grounds and into the castle. Madam Pomfrey; the nurse, was kept busy by a sudden spate of colds among the staff and students. Her Pepperup potion worked instantly, though it left the drinker smoking at the ears for several hours afterward. Ginny Weasley, who had been looking pale, was bullied into taking some by Percy. The steam pouring from under her vivid hair gave the impression that her whole head was on fire. Even the twins were ordered to take the concoction by Severus when he heard the two sneeze, snuffle and cough. Harry would take it without problems, however for Hally, she would take off from one side of the hospital wing to the other, just to keep from taking the Pepperup potion, and keep Madam Pomfrey on her toes, which was quite expected from the raven-red-streak-haired girl.

Raindrops the size of bullets thundered on the castle windows for days on end; the lake rose, the flower beds turned into muddy streams, and Hagrid's pumpkins swelled to the size of garden sheds. Oliver Wood's enthusiasm for regular training sessions, however, was not dampened, which was why Harry and Hally was to be found, late one stormy Saturday afternoon a few days before Halloween, returning to Gryffindor Tower, drenched to their skins and splattered with mud. They wouldn't dare try to track water and mud inside their father's living quarters.

Even aside from the rain and wind it hadn't been a happy practice session. Fred and George, who had been spying on the Slytherin team, had seen for themselves the speed of those new Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones. They reported that the Slytherin team was no more than seven greenish blurs, shooting through the air like missiles.

As the twins squelched along the deserted corridor they came across somebody who looked just as preoccupied as they were. Nearly Headless Nick, the ghost of Gryffindor Tower, was staring morosely out of a window, muttering under his breath, "...don't fulfill their requirements...half an inch, if that..."

"Hello Nick," the twins greeted

"Hello, hello," said Nearly Headless Nick, starting and looking round. He wore a dashing, plump hat on his long curly hair, and a tunic with a ruff, which concealed the fact that his neck was almost completely severed. He was pale as smoke, and the twins could see right through him to the dark sky and torrential rain outside.

"You look troubled, young Potters," said Nick, folding a transparent letter as he spoke and tucking it inside his doublet.

"So do you," Harry and Hally stated in return

"Ah," Nearly Headless Nick waved an elegant hand, "A matter of no importance....It's no as though I really wanted to join....Thought I'd apply, but apparently I 'don't fulfill requirements'..."

"They turned you down again Nick?" Hally asked suddenly, shocked to find that the ghost of Gryffindor was denied again.

"Ah, it's not important my little imp," Nearly Headless Nick answered

In spite of his airy tone, there was a look of great bitterness on his face.

"But you would think, wouldn't you," he erupted suddenly, pulling the letter back out of his pocket, "that getting hit forty-five times in the neck with a blunt axe would qualify you to join the Headless Hunt?"

"Oh—yes," said the twins, who were obviously supposed to agree.

"I mean, nobody wishes more than I do that it had all been quick and clean, and my head had come off properly, I mean, it would have saved me a great deal of pain and ridicule. However..."

Nearly Headless Nick shook his letter open and read furiously:

"We can only accept huntsmen whose heads have

parted company with their bodies. You will appreciate that it would be impossible otherwise for members to participate in hunt activities such as Horseback Head-Juggling and Head Polo. It is with the greatest regret, Therefore, that I must inform you that you do not fulfill Our requirements. With very best wishes, Sir Patrick Delaney-Podmore.”

Fuming, Nearly Headless Nick stuffed the letter away.

“Half an inch of skin and sinew holding my neck on, you two! Most people would think that’s good and beheaded, but oh, no, it’s not enough for Sir Properly Decapitated-Podmore.”

Nearly Headless Nick took several deep breaths and then said, in a far calmer tone, “So—what’s been bothering you two? Anything I can do?”

“No,” said Harry and Hally. “Not unless you know where we could get seven Nimbus two thousand and Ones for our match against Sly—

The rest of the twin’s sentence was drowned out by a high-pitched mewling from somewhere near their ankles. They looked down and found themselves gazing into a pair of lamp-like yellow eyes. It was Mrs. Norris, the skeletal gray cat who was used by the caretaker, Argus Filch, as a sort of deputy in his endless battle against students.

“You better get out of here, you two,” said Nick quickly. “Filch isn’t in a good mood—he’s got the flu and some third years accidentally plastered frog brains all over the ceiling in dungeon five. He’s been cleaning all morning, and if he sees you two dripping mud all over the place...”

“Right,” said Harry, backing away from the accusing stare of Mrs. Norris along with his twin sister Hally, but not quick enough. Drawn to the spot by the mysterious power that seemed to connect him with this foul cat, Argus Filch burst suddenly through a tapestry to the right from the twins, wheezing and looking wildly about for the rule-breaker. There was a thick tartan scarf bound around his head, and his nose was unusually purple.

“Filth!” he shouted, his jowls aquiver, his eyes popping alarmingly as he pointed at the muddy puddles that had dripped from Harry and Hally’s Quidditch robes. “Mess and muck everywhere! I’ve had enough of it, I tell you! Follow me Potters!”

So the twins waved a gloomy good-bye to Nearly Headless Nick and followed Filch back downstairs, doubling the number of muddy footprints on the floor.

Now even though Hally had practically grew up inside of Hogwarts, not even she nor Harry had ever been inside Filch’s office before; it was a place most students avoided. The room was dingy and windowless, lit by a single oil lamp dangling from the low ceiling. A faint smell of fried fish lingered about the place. Wooden filing cabinets stood around the walls; from their labels, both twins could see that they contained details of every pupil Filch had ever punished. Fred and George Weasley had an entire drawer to themselves. A highly polished collection of chains and manacles hung on the wall behind Filch’s desk. It was common knowledge that he was always begging Dumbledore to let him suspend students by their ankles from the ceiling.

Filch grabbed a quill from a pot on his desk and began shuffling around looking for parchment.

“Dung,” he muttered furiously, “great sizzling dragon bogies...frog brains...rat intestines...I’ve had enough of it...make an example...where’s the form...yes...”

He retrieved a large roll of Parchment from his desk drawer and stretched it out in front of him, dipping his long black quill into the ink pot.

“Names...Harry and Hally Potter...Crime...”

“It was only a bit of mud!” said the twins

“It’s only a bit of mud to you two, but to me it’s an extra hour scrubbing!” Filch shouted, a drip shivering unpleasantly at the end of his bulbous nose. “Crime...befouling the castle...suggested sentence...”

“Well that is your job Filchy, to keep the castle clean,” Hally blurted out with a roll of her eyes just then.

Filch continued to glare at the twins who waited with bated breaths for their sentence to fall.

But as Filch lowered his quill, there was a great BANG! On the ceiling of the office, which made the oil lamp rattle.

“PEEVES!” Filch roared, flinging down his quill in a transport of rage. “I’ll have you this time, I’ll have you!”

And without a backward glance at the twins, Filch ran flat-footed from the office, Mrs. Norris streaking alongside him.

Peeves was the school poltergeist, a grinning, airborne menace who lived to cause havoc and distress. But to Hally, he was a great partner on many pranks that was set upon the first year students. Harry did not like Peeves as much as his twin sister did, but he couldn’t help feeling grateful for their timing. Hopefully, whatever Peeves had done (and it sounded as though he’s wrecked something very big this time) would distract Filch from Harry and Hally.

Thinking that they should probably wait for Filch to come back, Harry and Hally sank into mouth-eaten chairs next to the desk. There was only one thing on it apart from Filch’s half completed form: a large, glossy, purple envelope with silver lettering on the front. With a quick glance at the door to check that Filch wasn’t on his way back, Harry picked up the envelop to read it with his twin.

KWIKSPELL

A Correspondence Course In Beginners' Magic

Intrigued, Harry flicked the envelop open and pulled out the sheaf of parchment inside. More curly silver writing on the front page said:

Feel out of step in the world of modern magic? Find yourself making

Excuses not to perform simple spells? Ever been taunted for your

Woeful wandwork?

There is an answer!

Kwikspell is an all-new, fail-safe, quick-result, easy-learn course.

Hundreds of witches and wizards have benefited from the Kwikspell

Method!

Madam Z. Nettles of Topsham writes:

"I had no memory for incantations and my potions were a family joke!

Now, after a Kwikspell course, I am the center of attentions of parties

And friends beg for the recipe of my Scintillation Solution!"

Warlock D.J. Prod of Didsbury says:

"My wife used to sneer at my feeble charms, but one month into your

fabulous Kwikspell course and I succeeded in turning her into a yak!

Thank you, Kwikspell!"

Fascinated, Harry thumbed through the rest of the envelope's contents while his sister Hally could only go into a fit of giggles. Why on earth did Filch want a Kwikspell course? Did this mean he wasn't

a proper wizard? Harry was just reading “Lesson one: Holding Your Wand (some Useful Tips)” when shuffling footsteps outside told them Filch was coming back. Stuffing the parchment back into the envelope, Harry threw it back onto the desk just as the door opened.

Filch was looking triumphant.

“That vanishing cabinet was extremely valuable!” he was saying gleefully to Mrs. Norris. “We’ll have Peeves out this time, my sweet...”

His eyes fell onto the twins and then darted to the Kwikspell envelope, which Harry realized too late, was laying two feet away from where it had started, and with his little sister looking at Filch and giggling, wasn’t helping them out either.

Filch’s pasty face went brick red. Harry and Hally both braced themselves for a tidal wave of fury. Filch hobbled across to his desk, snatched up the envelope and threw it into a drawer.

“Have you—did you read...?” he sputtered

“No,” Lied Harry and Hally quickly.

Filch’s knobby hands were twisting together.

“If I thought you’d read my private—not that it’s mine—for a friend—be that as it may—however...”

The twins were staring at him, alarmed; Filch had never looked madder. His eyes were popping, a tic was going in one of his pouchy cheeks, and the tartans scarf didn’t help.

“Very well—go—and don’t breathe a word—not that—however, if you didn’t read—go now, I have to write up Peeves’ report—go...”

Amazed at their luck, Harry sped out of the office, however Hally stayed behind staring at Filch.

“Didn’t I say go...”

“Mr. Filch, Peeves is just being Peeves. He’s always doing things like that, and well...he’s my friend...”

“All the better to be rid of...,”

“How would you like it if someone let’s say...Dumbledore told you that Mrs. Norris had to go! How would you feel sir? You would feel the same way as I do...just don’t be too hard on Peeves,” Hally spoke out her plea quietly before speeding out of Filch’s office next, and meeting Harry outside in the corridor.

They both ran up the corridor and back upstairs. To escape Filch’s office without punishment was probably some kind of school record.

“Harry! Hally! Did it work?”

Nearly Headless Nick came gliding out of a classroom. Behind him, the twins could see the wreckage of a large black-and-gold cabinet that appeared to have been dropped from a great height.

“I persuaded Peeves to crash it right over Filch’s office,” said Nick eagerly. “Thought it might distract him...”

Hally’s eyebrows rose up in surprise.

“Was that you?” Harry asked gratefully. “Yeah, it worked, we didn’t even get detention. Thanks Nick!”

The three set off up the corridor together. Nearly Nick, the twins noticed, was still holding Sir Patrick’s rejection letter.

“We wish there was something we could do for you about the Headless Hunt,” Harry said.

“Be careful of what you wish for Harry,” Hally whispered to her brother as she noticed Nearly Headless Nick listening to Harry’s words.

Nearly Headless Nick stopped in his tracks and both Harry and Hally walked right through him. Harry wished they hadn't; it was like stepping through an icy shower.

"But there is something you both could do for me," said Nick excitedly. "Harry, Hally—would I be asking too much—but no, you wouldn't want..."

"What is it?" Harry and Hally asked at one time

"Well, this Halloween will be my five hundredth deathday," said Nearly Headless Nick, drawing himself up and looking dignified.

"Oh," Said Harry, not sure whether he should look sorry or happy about this. "Right." Hally closed her eyes, knowing what was going to be asked of them.

"I'm holding a party down in one of the roomier dungeons. Friends will be coming from all over the country. It would be such an honor if you two would attend. Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger would be most welcome, too, of course—but I daresay you'd both rather go to the school feast?" He watched the twins on tenterhooks.

"No," Harry said quickly, "we'll come..."

"Wonderful! The Potters, at my deathday party! And"—He hesitated, looking excited—"do you think you two could possibly mention to Sir Patrick how very frightening and impressive you two find me?"

"Of-of course," the twins answered

Nearly Headless Nick beamed at them.

"A deathday party?" Hermione asked keenly when Harry and Hally had changed at last and joined her and Ron in the common room. "I bet there aren't many living people who can say they've been to one of those--it'll be fascinating!"

"Why would anyone want to celebrate the day they died?" Said Ron, who was halfway through his Potions homework and grumpy. "Sounds dead depressing to me..."

"Well why would anyone celebrate the day of their birth Ron hmm?" Hally threw a question back at him, a bit angry over the red-haired boy's rudeness. "It would be the same thing, only...different."

Rain was still lashing the windows, which were now inky black, but inside all looked bright and cheerful. The firelight glowed over the countless squashy armchairs where people sat reading, talking, doing homework or, in the case of Fred and George Weasley, trying to find out what would happen if you fed a Filibuster firework to a salamander. Fred had "rescued" the brilliant orange, fire-dwelling lizard from a Care of Magical Creatures class and it was now smouldering gently on a table surrounded by a knot of curious people.

The twins were at the point of telling Ron and Hermione about Filch and the Kwikspell course when the salamander suddenly whirled wildly round the room. The sight of Percy bellowing himself hoarse at Fred and George, the spectacular display of tangerine stars showering from the salamander's mouth, and its escape into the fire, with accompanying explosions, drove both Filch and the Kwikspell envelope from Harry and Hally's minds.

By the time Halloween arrived, Harry and Hally both was regretting their rash promise to go to the deathday party. The rest of the school was happily anticipating their Halloween feast; the Great Hall had been decorated with the usual live bats, Hagrid's vast Pumpkins had been carved into lanterns large enough for three men to sit in, and there were rumors that Dumbledore had booked a troupe of dancing skeletons for the entertainment.

"A promise is a promise," Hermione reminded the twins bossily as usual. "You both said that you two would go to the deathday party."

So at seven o'clock, Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione walked straight past the doorway to the packed Great Hall, which was glittering invitingly with gold plates and candles, and directed their steps instead toward the dungeons.

The passageway leading to Nearly Headless Nick's party had been lined with candles, too, though the effect was far from cheerful: These were long, thin, jet-black tapers, all burning bright blue, casting a dim, ghostly light even over their own living faces. The temperature dropped with every step they took. As Harry and Hally shivered and drew their robes tightly around them, they heard what sounded like a thousand fingernails scraping an enormous blackboard.

"Is that supposed to be music?" Ron whispered. They turned a corner and saw Nearly Headless Nick standing at a doorway hung with black velvet drapes.

"My dear friends," he said mournfully. "Welcome, welcome...so pleased you could come..."

He swept off his plumed hat and bowed them inside.

It was an incredible sight. The dungeons was full of hundreds of pearly-white, translucent people, mostly drifting around a crowded dance floor, waltzing to the dreadful, quavering sound of thirty musical saws, played by an orchestra on a raised, black-draped platform. A chandelier overhead blazed midnight-blue with a thousand more black candles. Their breath rose in a mist before them; it was like stepping into a freezer.

"Shall we have a look around?" Harry suggested, wanting to warm up his feet.

"You took the words right out of my mouth big brother...my feet is so cold," Hally commented through chattering teeth

"Careful not to walk through anyone," said Ron nervously, and they all set off around the edge of the dance floor. They passed a group of gloomy nuns, a ragged man wearing chains, and the Fat Friar, a cheerful Hufflepuff ghost, who was talking to a knight with an arrow sticking out of his forehead. Harry nor Hally was surprised to see the Bloody Baron, a gaunt, staring Slytherin ghost covered in silver bloodstains, was being giving a wideberth by the other ghosts.

"Oh, no," said Hermione, stopping abruptly. "Turn back, turn back, I don't want to talk to Moaning Myrtle--"

"Who?" Harry asked as they backtracked quickly.

"She haunts one of the toilets in the girls' bathroom on the first floor," Hermione explained

"She haunts a toilet?"

"Yes. It's been out-of-order all year because she keeps having tantrums and flooding the place. I never went in there anyway if I could avoid it; it's awful trying to have a pee with her wailing at you--"

"Hermione, that isn't a very nice thing to say...although I have to admit, I do try to avoid it as well..."

"Look, food!" said Ron.

On the other side of the dungeon was a long table, also covered in black velvet. They approached it eagerly but next moment had stopped in their tracks, horrified. The smell was quite disgusting. Large, rotten fish were laid on handsome silver platters; cakes, burned charcoal-black, were heaped on salvers; there was a great maggoty haggis, a slab of cheese covered in furry green mold and, in pride of place, an enormous gray cake in the shape of a tombstone, with tar-like icing forming the words,

SIR NICHOLAS DE. MIMSY-PORPINGTON

DIED 31ST OCTOBER, 1492

The twins watched, amazed, as a portly ghost approached the table, crouched low, and walked through it, his mouth held wide so that it passed through one of the stinking salmon.

"Can you taste it if you walk through it?" Harry and Hally asked him simultaneously

"Almost," said the ghost sadly, and he drifted away.

"I expect the've let it rot to give it a stronger flavor," said Hermione knowledgeably, pinching her nose and leaning closer to look at the putrid haggis.

"Can we move? I feel sick," said Ron

"What's the matter Ron, is your stomach not into it this time?" Hally teased the red-haired boy. Harry blurted out a snigger.

"Oh shut Hally," Ron groaned, his face turning green from the sight of the rotted buffet.

They had barely turned around, however, when a little man swooped suddenly from under the table and came to a halt in midair before them.

"Hello Peeves," Harry greeted cautiously.

"Hi Peeves," Hally grinned from ear to ear.

Unlike the ghosts around them, Peeves the Poltergeist was the very reverse of pale and transparent. He was wearing a bright orange party hat, a revolving bow tie, and a broad grin on his wide wicked face.

"Nibbles?" He said sweetly, offering them a bowl of peanuts covered in fungus under Ron's nose. Ron had to cover his mouth to keep from retching. The twins, however, couldn't help but laugh at the scene.

"No thanks," said Hermione.

"Heard you talking about poor Myrtle," said Peeves, his eyes dancing, "Rude you was about poor Myrtle," He took a deep breath and bellowed, "OY! MYRTLE!"

"Oh no, Peeves, don't tell her what I said, she'll be really upset," Hermione whispered frantically. "I didn't mean it, I don't mind her--er, hello Myrtle."

The squat ghost of a girl had glided over. She had the glummiest face Harry had ever seen, half-hidden behind lank hair and thick pearly spectacles.

"What?" she said sulkily.

"How are you, Myrtle?" Hermione asked in a falsely bright voice. "It's nice to see you out of the toilet."

Myrtle sniffed.

"Miss Granger was just talking about you--" said Peeves slyly in Myrtle's ear.

"Just saying--saying--how nice you look tonight," said Hermione, glaring at Peeves.

Myrtle eyed Hermione suspiciously.

"You're making fun of me," she said, silver tears welling rapidly in her small, see-through eyes.

"No--honestly--didn't I just say how nice Myrtle's looking?" Hermione asked, nudging Harry, Hally and elbowed Ron painfully in the ribs.

"Oh, yeah--"

"She did--"

"Said you were really nice looking--"

"Don't lie to me," Myrtle gasped, tears now flooding down her face, while Peeves chuckled happily over her shoulder. "D'you think I don't know what people call me behind my back? Fat Myrtle! Ugly Myrtle! Miserable, moaning, moping Myrtle!"

"You've forgotten pimply," Peeves hissed in her ear. Hally had to stifle a snigger swiftly.

Moaning Myrtle burst into anguished sobs and fled from the dungeon. Peeves shot after, pelting her with moldy peanuts, yelling, "PIMPLY! PIMPLY!"

"Oh, dear," said Hermione sadly.

Nearly Headless Nick now drifted toward them through the crowd.

"Enjoying yourselves?"

"Oh, yes," they lied.

"Not a bad turnout," said Nearly Headless Nick proudly. "The Wailing Widow came all the way up from Kent...It's nearly time for my speech, I'd better go and warn the orchestra..."

The orchestra, however, stopped playing at the very moment. They and everyone else in the dungeon, fell silent, looking around in excitement, as a hunting horn sounded.

"Oh, here we go," said Nearly Headless Nick Bitterly.

Through the dungeon wall burst a dozen ghost horses, each ridden by a headless horseman. The assembly clapped wildly; Harry was about to clap, too, but stopped quickly at the sight of Nick's face.

The horses galloped into the middle of the dance floor and halted, rearing and plunging. At the front of the pack was a large ghost who held his bearded head under his arm, from which position he was blowing the horn. The ghost leapt down, lifted his head high in the air so he could see over the crowd (everyone laughed), and strode over to Nearly Headless Nick, squashing his head back onto his neck.

"Nick!" he roared. "How are you? Head still hanging in there?"

He gave a hearty guffaw and clapped Nearly Headless Nick on the shoulder.

"Welcome, Patrick," said Nick stiffly.

"Live 'uns!" said Sir Patrick, spotting Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione and giving a huge, fake jump of astonishment, so that his head fell off again (the crowd howled with laughter).

"Very amusing," said Nearly Headless Nick darkly.

"Don't mind Nick!" shouted Sir Patrick's head from the floor. "Still upset we won't let him join the Hunt! But I mean to say--look at the fellow--"

"I think," the twins said hurriedly, at a meaningful look from Nick, "Nick's very--frightening and--er--"

"Ha!" Yelled Sir Patrick's head. "Bet he asked you two to say that!"

"If I could have everyone's attention, it's time for my speech!" said Nearly Headless Nick loudly, striding toward the podium and climbing into an icy blue spotlight.

"My late lamented lords, ladies, and gentlemen, it is my great sorrow..."

But nobody heard much more. Sir Patrick and the rest of the Headless Hunt had just started a game of Head Hockey and the crowd were turning to watch. Nearly Headless Nick tried vainly to recapture his audience, but gave up as Sir Patrick's head went sailing past him to loud cheers.

The twins were very cold by now, not to mention hungry.

"I can't stand much more of this," Ron muttered, his teeth chattering, as the orchestra ground back into action and the ghosts swept back onto the dance floor.

"Let's go," Harry and Hally agreed.

They backed toward the door, nodding and beaming at anyone who looked at them, and a minute later were hurrying back up the passageway full of black candles.

"Pudding might not be finished yet," said Ron hopefully, leading the way toward the steps to the entrance hall.

And then both Harry and Hally heard it.

"...rip...tear...kill..."

It was the same voice, the same cold, murderous voice they had heard in Lockhart's office.

They stumbled to a halt, clutching at the stone wall, listening with all his might, looking around, squinting up and down the dimly lit passageway.

"Harry, Hally, what're you--?"

"It's that voice again--shut up a minute--"

"...Soo hungry...for so long..."

"Listen!" Both Harry and Hally cried out urgently, and Ron and Hermione froze, watching them.

"...Kill...time to kill..."

The voice was growing fainter. Harry and Hally both was sure it was moving away--moving upward. A mixture of fear and excitement gripped them as they stared at the dark ceiling; how could it be moving upward? Was it a phantom, to whom stone ceilings didn't matter?

"This way!" The twins shouted simultaneously, and they begun to run, up the stairs, into the entrance hall. It was no good hoping to hear anything here, the babble of talk from the Halloween Feast was echoing out of the Great Hall. Harry and Hally sprinted up the marble staircase to the first floor, Ron and Hermione clattering right behind them.

"Harry, Hally what're we--"

"SHH!"

The twins strained their ears. Distantly, from the floor above and growing fainter still, they heard the voice: "...I smell blood...I SMELL BLOOD!"

Their stomachs lurched--

"It's going to kill someone!" Harry shouted

"Oh good gods!" Hally yelled, and ignoring Ron's and Hermione's bewildered faces, the two ran up the next flight of steps three at a time, trying to listen over their own pounding footsteps---

They hurtled around the whole of the second floor, Ron and Hermione panting behind them, not stopping until they turned a corner into the last, deserted passage.

"Hey you two, what was that all about?" Ron asked them, wiping sweat off his face. "I couldn't hear anything..."

But Hermione gave a sudden gasp, pointing down the corridor.

"Look!"

Something was shining on the wall ahead. They approached slowly, squinting through the darkness. Foot-high words had been daubed on the wall between two windows, shimmering in the light cast by the flaming torches.

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN

OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE.

"What's that thing--hanging underneath?" Ron asked, a slight quiver in his voice.

As they edged nearer, Harry and Hally both almost slipped--there was a large puddle of water on the floor; Ron and Hermione grabbed for each of them, and they inched toward the message, eyes fixed on

a dark shadow beneath it. All four of them realized what it was at once, and leapt backward with a splash.

Hally started to breath heavily with wide eyes. "M-Mrs. Norris?" she called out wearily, hoping to hear a response from the figure.

Mrs. Norris, the caretaker's cat, was hanging by her tail from the torch bracket. She was stiff as a board, her eyes wide and staring. For a few seconds, they didn't move. Then Ron said, "Let's get out of here."

"Shouldn't we try and help--" Harry began awkwardly. Hally nodded eagerly in agreement, no matter how much of a pain Mrs. Norris was, Hally still liked seeing the feline roaming around the school.

"Trust me," said Ron. "We don't want to be found here."

But it was too late. A rumble, as though of distant thunder, told them that the feast had just ended. From either end of the corridor where they all stood came the sound of hundreds of feet climbing the stairs, and the loud, happy talk of well-fed people; next moment, students were crashing into the passage from both ends.

The clatter, the bustle, the noise died suddenly as the people in front spotted the hanging cat. Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione stood alone, in the middle of the corridor, as silence fell among the mass fo students pressing forward to see the grisly sight.

Then someone shouted through the quiet.

"Enemies of the heir beware! You'll be next Mudbloods!"

It was Draco Malfoy. He had pushed to the front of the crowd, his cold eyes alive, his usually bloodless face flushed, as he grinned at the sight of the hanging, immobile cat.

Hally went to leap at the platinum-blond boy getting held back by her brother Harry.

"I'll rip you apart Malfoy!" She yelled, growling in anger.

"Hal, stop it...Mr. Filch!" Harry exclaimed with wide eyes.

They stood still as they seen the caretaker heading their way over to where they stood.

A/N: That is all for chapter 19. See you in chapter 20 bye for now.

Chapter 20 THE WRITING ON THE WALL

They stood still as they seen the caretaker heading their way over to where they stood...

"What's going on here? What's going on?"

Attracted no doubt by Malfoy's shout, Argus Filch came shouldering his way through the crowd. Then he saw Mrs. Norris and fell back, clutching his face in horror; Hally suddenly felt sympathy for the caretaker at that moment.

"My cat! My cat! What's happened to Mrs. Norris?" He shrieked. And his popping eyes fell upon Harry and Hally both.

"You two!" he screeched. "You two! You two murdered my cat! You two had killed her! I'll kill you two! I'll—

"ARGUS!"

Dumbledore had arrived on the scene, followed by a number of other teachers. In seconds, he had swept past Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione and Detached Mrs. Norris from the torch bracket.

"Come with me Argus," he said to Filch. "You too, Mr. Potter, Miss Potter, Mr. Weasley, Miss Granger."

Lockhart stepped forward eagerly.

"My office is nearest, Headmaster—just upstairs—please fell free—

"Thank you Gilderoy," said Dumbledore.

The silent crowd parted to let them pass. Lockhart, looking excited and important, hurried after Dumbledore; so did Professors McGonagall and Snape.

As they entered Lockhart's darkened office there was a flurry of movement across the walls; Harry and Hally both saw several of Lockharts in the pictures dodging out of sight, their hair in rollers. The

real Lockhart lit the candles on his desk and stood back. Dumbledore lay Mrs. Norris on the polished surface and began to examine her. Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione exchanged tense looks and sank into chairs outside the pool of candlelight, watching.

The tip of Dumbledore's long, crooked nose was barely an inch from Mrs. Norris's fur. He was looking at her closely through his half-moon spectacles, his long fingers gently prodding and poking. Professor McGonagall was bent almost as close, her eyes narrowed. Severus Snape loomed behind them, half in shadow, wearing a most peculiar expression: It was as though he was trying hard not to smile. And Lockhart was hovering around all of them, making suggestions.

"She's not dead," Hally blurted out while looking up at the ceiling shaking slightly. All the professors' eyes slowly landed onto her, listening intently. "She's still alive," she added a second later.

But Lockhart wasn't listening, waving his hands around. "It was definitely a curse that killed her—probably the Transmogrifan Torture—I've seen it used many times, so unlucky I wasn't there, I know the very countercurse that would have saved her..."

Lockhart's comments were punctuated by Filch's dry, racking sobs. He was slumped in a chair by the desk, unable to look at Mrs. Norris, his face in his hands. Much as they detested Filch, Harry and Hally couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for him, though not nearly as sorry as they felt for themselves, if Dumbledore believed Filch, they would be expelled for sure.

Dumbledore was now muttering strange words under his breath and tapping Mrs. Norris with his wand but nothing happened: She continued to look as though she had been recently stuffed.

"...I remember something very similar happening in Ouagadougou," said Lockhart, "A series of attacks, the full story's in my autobiography, I was able to provide the townsfolk with various amulets, which cleared the matter up at once..."

“Oh you never done anything like that before in your life you big fat fraud!” Hally blurted out loudly, then covered her mouth swiftly after seeing Severus look down at her in a very stern manner.

The photographs of Lockhart on the walls were all nodding in agreement over Lockhart’s words. One of them had forgotten to remove his hair net.

At last Dumbledore straightened up.

“She’s not dead, Argus,” He said softly “Just what Miss Potter has told us.”

Lockhart stopped abruptly in the middle of counting the number of murders he had prevented, looking down at Hally as she looked back his way and stuck her tongue out at him as if by saying (see you big fraud? Not dead Nyah!)

“Not dead?” choked Filch, looking through his fingers at Mrs. Norris. “But why’s she all—all stiff and frozen?”

“She has been petrified,” said Dumbledore (Ah! I thought so!” said Lockhart). “But how, I cannot say...”

“Ask them!” shrieked Filch, turning his blotched and tearstained face to the twins.

“No second year could have done this...even if Mr. and Miss Potter are well advanced in their charms,” Dumbledore said firmly. “It would take Dark Magic of the most advanced...”

“They did it, they did it!” Filch spat, his pouchy face purpling. “You saw what they wrote on the wall! They found—in my office—they know I’m a—I’m a...” Filch’s face worked horribly. “They know I’m a Squib!” he finished.

“We never touched Mrs. Norris!” The twins cried out loudly, uncomfortably aware of everyone looking at them, including all the Lockharts on the walls. “And I don’t even know what a Squib is.” Harry added

“But I do,” Hally replied, “But we never laid a hand on her! I like Mrs. Norris! I would never do that to her!”

“Rubbish!” Snarled Filch. “They saw my Kwikspell letter!”

“Oh big deal on the letter Filchy! So you can’t do magic....Well so what! It doesn’t mean that we hurt her!” Hally lashed out in defense for her brother and herself.

“If I might speak, headmaster,” said Severus from the shadows, while watching his twin’s tense up with a sense of forboding increased; they was sure nothing their dad was going to say would help them out at that moment.

“Connor, Raven and their friends may have simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time,” Severus said, a slight sneer curling his mouth as though he doubted it. “But we do have a set of suspicious circumstances here. Why was they in the upstairs corridor at all? Why wasn’t they at the Halloween feast?”

Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione all four launched into an explanation about the deathday party. “...there were hundreds of ghosts, they’ll tell you we were there...”

“But why not join the feast afterward?” Severus drilled at the four, his black eyes glittering in the candlelight. “Why go up to that corridor?”

Ron and Hermione looked at the twins.

“Because—because...,” Harry and Hally said at one time, their hearts thumping very fast; something told them it would sound very far-fetched if they told them they had been there by a bodiless voice no one but they could hear, “Because we were tired and wanted to go to bed,” they said.

“Without any supper?” Severus questioned them, a triumphant smile flickering across his gaunt face. “I didn’t think ghosts provided food fit for living people at their parties.”

"They don't," Harry and Hally spoke out at one time shuddering over the rotted food that they had seen before them at the deathday party. Severus stifled a chuckle from noticing the looks on their faces, he then realized that they had lost their appetite at the party.

"We weren't hungry," Said Ron loudly as his stomach gave a huge rumble.

The twins covered their faces along with Hermione, sniggering in silence. Severus smiled nastily over at Ron just then.

"I suggest, headmaster, that Connor and Raven here are not being entirely truthful," Severus said. "It might be a good idea if they were deprived of certain privileges until they are ready to tell us the whole story. I personally feel they should be taken off the Gryffindor Quidditch team until they are ready to be honest." Severus spoke out in a hidden teasing tone that only the twins caught on with by their own ears.

"Really Severus," said Professor McGonagall sharply, "I see no reason to stop the twins from playing Quidditch. This cat wasn't hit over the head by a broomstick. There is no evidence at all that Mr. and Miss Potter has done anything wrong."

Dumbledore was giving Harry and Hally a searching look. His twinkling light-blue gaze made the twins feel as though they were being X-rayed.

"Innocent until proven guilty Severus," Dumbledore said firmly.

Severus feigned furiousness. Filch, however, did look furious.

"My cat has been Petrified!" Filch shrieked, his eyes popping. "I want to see some punishment!"

"We will be able to cure her, Argus," said Dumbledore patiently. "Professor Sprout recently managed to procure some Mandrakes. As soon as they have reached their full size, I will have a potion made that will revive Mrs. Norris."

"I'll make it," Lockhart butted in. "I must have done it a hundred times. I could whip up a Mandrake Restorative Draught in my sleep..."

"STAY AWAY FROM MR. FILCH'S CAT!" Hally bellowed out with flashing eyes, growling in warning at Lockhart

"Excuse me," said Severus interrupting Hally quickly after seeing the look of kill clearly written on her face. "But I believe I am the Potions Master at this school."

There was a very awkward pause.

"You four may go," Dumbledore said to Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione.

They were about to leave quickly before Dumbledore raised his hand, stopping them briefly. "To Severus's living quarters for the night...all four of you," he told them while he watched Hally gently stroke Mrs. Norris's fur.

"Raven, go on. She'll be fine," Severus assured his adopted daughter.

They went, as quickly as they could to Severus's quarters without actually running. When they were a floor below from Lockhart's office, they turned into one of the dungeon's empty classrooms and closed the door quietly behind them. The twins adjusted their eyes at their friends' darkened faces.

"D'you think we should have told them about that voice we heard?" Harry asked suddenly

"No," Said Ron, without hesitation. "Hearing voices no one else can hear isn't a good sign, even in the wizarding world."

Something in Ron's voice made Harry ask, "You do believe us, don't you?"

"Course I do," Said Ron quickly, "But—you two must admit it's weird..."

Hally was about to make a retort when Harry stopped her, "We know it's weird," Harry said, "The whole thing's weird. What was that writing on the wall about? The chamber has been opened....what's that supposed to mean?"

"You know, it rings a sort of bell," Ron commented slowly. "I think someone told me a story about a secret chamber at Hogwarts once...might've been Bill..."

"It's an old legend," Hally stated to Harry. "But even I can't tell you where it all began."

"Ok. And what on earth's a squib?" Harry asked them

To his surprise, Ron stifled a snigger, seeing Hally giving him glares.

"Well—it's not funny really—but as it's Filch," he said. "A Squib is someone who was born into a wizarding family but hasn't got any magic powers. Kind of the opposite of Muggle-born wizards, but Squibs are quite unusual. If Filch's trying to learn magic from a Kwikspell course, I reckon he must be a Squib. It would explain a lot. Like why he hates students so much." Ron gave a satisfied smile. "He's bitter."

A clock chimed somewhere.

"Midnight," the twins said. "We'd better get to dad's quarters before he comes along and tries to get us for something else."

They took out of the empty classroom, and continued onward to Severus's living quarters, filing inside one by one in silence. They practically plopped onto the furniture just before Severus strode inside minutes later, closing and locking the door behind him. He stood before the four Gryffindors crossing his arms.

"Now then, from the beginning. Why didn't you four come to the feast after you left the party?" Severus questioned then pointed his finger down at Ron. "And do not lie to me about not being hungry Mr. Weasley, I heard your stomach in Lockhart's office loud and clear."

Ron squirmed in his seat, the twins started babbling at one time to Severus before he stopped them. "Enough. I swear the two of you will have my hair turning grey before my time." he told them before heading into the small kitchen area.

"Oh and Raven, Mrs. Norris will be in good hands. I believe you gave Filch a surprising shock over shouting at Lockhart." Severus informed the raven-red-streak-haired girl.

"I don't like that man. Always thinking that he can do better than anyone else." Hally replied

Severus walked out of the small kitchen area moments later, carrying a platter. "Oh, I believe everyone figured that out Raven," he smirked setting the platter down onto the round table . "Come eat, all of you," he added watching them scramble to the table, sitting down.

"What I can't understand," Hermione began as she went to grab one of the thick sandwiches, "Is why would anyone want to write something like that on the wall."

"No one knows Miss. Granger," Severus could only reply, taking a seat between her and Hally. The twins looked up at Severus quietly. "Now what?" he questioned them with a sigh.

"Off of the Gryffindor Quidditch team dad?" they asked with raised eyebrows, waiting for an answer

"Ahem...well it was worth it, seeing the looks on both of your faces." Severus chuckled at last

"So not funny dad...they have Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones! All of them..."

"And that's a bad thing?" Severus asked hiding a grin on his face

"Yes!" "Ah! So I guess I should send back both brooms then," Severus replied with meaning.

"What do you mean our brooms?" Harry and Hally asked wearily

"Now how long was it going to take for you both to figure out that there is something different in here?" Severus enquired pointing over at a corner. There in the corner of room was two brand new Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones, sitting there waiting for the twins.

Both twins scrambled out of their seats with excitement, they each took their own broom with smiles on their faces while Ron's mouth nearly dropped to the floor.

"Now I wonder what would happen to your other brooms? Should they go to your beaters perhaps? Or should you allow my house team to win the cup this year?" Severus questioned them as they ran over to him and thanked him by giving him a heart felt hug.

"To Fred and George no doubt!" Harry and Hally grinned from ear to ear

"Now that's my twins and I believe in fairness when it comes to my house playing against my twins," Severus chuckled at their antics.

"whoa, Fred and George's own Nimbus Two Thousand brooms...not even scratched," Ron commented in awe.

"I should say not Mr. Weasley. I have seen Connor and Raven take very good care of those brooms and they will keep up with the latest model, I had it checked out personally. So don't listen to what Mr. Malfoy or anyone tells you about those Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones." Severus spoke to the twins

"Yeah, but Malfoy on the team?" Hally asked suddenly

"Now before you two say anything, that boy was made to tryout on his own before my house had ever gotten those brooms, and he was the only one that qualified for that position." Severus stated seeing the twins relax finally.

"Could have fooled me by the way Flint was talking," Hally muttered, remembering their encounter of the whole Slytherin team.

"I told the boy to put on an appearance and that was exactly what Mr. Flint had done," Severus told them

"Of all the rotten, sneaky, thing to do," the twins grinned hearing Severus laugh at the surprised looks on their faces.

"Exactly. Now then, may I suggest that we finish here? It is past the time that everyone here who should be in bed by now," Severus suggested, letting them get their fill before hurrying to get ready for bed.

"Harry are you sure?" Hermione asked a half hour later inside the twins's spare bedroom.

"I'm sure Hermione, you can take my bed, but don't get freaked out if you suddenly find me sneaking in here for a night time kiss," Harry teased the bushy-haired girl while raising his eyebrows up and down at her.

Hally let out a squeal of laughter from inside the twins bathroom after hearing her big brother tease Hermione.

"Harry...Hally that's not funny!" Hermione blushed three shades of pink on her face.

Severus stopped at the doorway, "I'll be sure to throw out a silencing charm in there for you Connor," He teased before heading to his own room for the night, chuckling after seeing Hermione's face go a bit more red.

"Professor Snape...oh gods!" Hermione hid her face swiftly just as Hally stepped out of the bathroom.

"Relax Hermione, Harry was only kidding around with you...although...he did chase Blaise around at our home this past summer over our first birthday party," Hally giggled

"Chased Blaise...how long has he noticed girls Hally?" Hermione asked suddenly

"Mmm...I'd say about the same time when I started to notice boys," Hally grinned, climbing into her own bed and snuggling under her soft warm blankets.

"Oh. Well if he sneaks in here while we sleep...stop laughing at me Hally!" Hermione grinned blushing once more as she got into Harry's bed, and snuggled under the blankets next.

Meanwhile inside the small living parlor, Harry sniggered with Ron after telling him what he did to Hermione. "Oh man and I just missed it...Hey Harry, you think that kissing girls is such a bad thing?" Ron asked suddenly while looking up at the ceiling with his arms crossed under his head.

"No, actually when I kissed Blaise at home, I really liked it," Harry grinned remembering that day very well just before they both drifted off to sleep.

For the next few days, the school could talk of little else but the attack on Mrs. Norris. Filch kept it fresh in everyone's minds by pacing the spot where she had been attacked, as though he thought the attacker might come back. The twins had seen him scrubbing the message on the wall with Mrs. Skower's All-Purpose Magical Mess Remover, but to no effect; the words still gleamed the scene of the crime, he was skulking red-eyed through the corridors, lunging out at unsuspecting students and trying to put them in detention for things like "Breathing loudly" and "Looking Happy."

Ginny Weasley seemed very disturbed by Mrs. Norris's fate. According to Ron, she was a great cat lover.

"But you haven't really got to know Mrs. Norris," Ron told her bracingly. "Honestly, we're much better off without her." Ginny's lip trembled. "Stuff like this doesn't happen at Hogwarts," Ron assured her. "They'll catch the maniac who did it and have him out of here in no time. I just hope he's got time to Petrify Filch before he's expelled. I'm only joking..." Ron added hastily as Ginny blanched.

The attack had also had an affect on Hermione as well. It was quite usual for Hermione to spend a lot of time reading, but she was now

doing almost nothing else. Nor could Harry, Hally and Ron get much response from her when they asked what she was up to, and not until the following Wednesday did they find out.

The twins held themselves back in Potions, where they volunteered to scrape tubeworms off the desks for their dad. After a hurried lunch, they went upstairs to meet Ron in the library, and saw Justin Finch-Fletchley, the Hufflepuff boy from Herbology, coming toward them. Harry and Hally had just opened their mouths to say hello when Justin caught sight of them, turned abruptly, and sped off in the opposite direction.

The twins found Ron at the back of the library, measuring his History of Magic homework. Professor Binns had asked for a three-foot-long composition on "The Medieval Assembly of European Wizards."

"I don't believe it, I'm still eight inches short..." Said Ron furiously, letting go of his parchment, which sprang back into a roll. "And Hermione's done four feet seven inches and her writing's tiny."

"Where is she?" The twins asked, grabbing the tape measure and unrolling their own homework.

"Somewhere over there," said Ron, pointing along the shelves. "Looking for another book. I think she's trying to read the whole library before Christmas."

The twins told Ron about Justin Finch-Fletchley running away from him.

"Dunno why you two care. I thought he was a bit of an idiot," said Ron, scribbling away, making his writing as large as possible. "All that junk about Lockhart being so great..."

Hermione emerged from between the bookshelves. She looked irritable and at last seemed ready to talk to them.

"All the copies of Hogwarts, A history have been taken out," she said, sitting down next to Harry and Hally. "And there's a two-week waiting

list. I wish I hadn't left my copy at home. But I couldn't fit it in my trunk with all the Lockhart books."

"Why do you want it?" Harry and Hally asked at one time.

"The same reason everyone else wants it," said Hermione, "To read up on the legend of the Chamber of Secrets."

"What's that?" Said Harry quickly.

"That's just it. I can't remember," said Hermione, biting her lip. "And I can't find the story anywhere else...,"

"Hermione, let me read your composition," said Ron desperately, checking his watch.

"No, I won't," said Hermione, suddenly severe. "You've had ten days to finish it..."

"I only need another two inches, come on..."

The bell rang. Ron and Hermione led the way to History of Magic, bickering.

History of Magic was the duller subject on their schedule. Professor Binns, who taught it, was their only ghost teacher, and the most exciting thing that ever happened in his classes was his entering the room through the blackboard. Ancient and shriveled, many people said he hadn't noticed he was dead. He had simply got up to teach one day and left his body behind him in an armchair in front of the staff room fire; his routine had not varied in the slightest since.

Today was as boring as ever. Professor Binns opened his notes and began to read in a flat drone like an old vacuum cleaner until nearly everyone in the class was in a deep stupor, occasionally coming to long enough to copy down a name or date, then falling asleep again. He had been speaking for half an hour when something happened that had never happened before. Hermione put up her hand.

Professor Binns, glancing up in the middle of a deadly dull lecture on the International Warlock Convention of 1289, looked amazed.

"Miss--er--?"

"Granger, Professor. I was wondering if you could tell us anything about the Chamber of Secrets." said Hermione in a clear voice.

Dean Thomas, who had been sitting with his mouth hanging open, gazing out of the window, jerked out of his trance; Lavender Brown's head came up off her arms and Neville Longbottom's elbow slipped off his desk.

Professor Binns blinked.

"My subject is History of Magic," he said in his dry, wheezy voice. "I deal with facts, Miss Granger, not myths and legends." He cleared his throat with a small noise like chalk snapping and continued. "In September of that year, a subcommittee of Sardinian sorcerers--"

He stuttered to a halt. Hermione's hand was waving in the air again.

"Miss Granger?"

"Please, sir, don't legends always have a basis in fact?"

Professor Binns was looking at her in such amazement, Harry and Hally both was sure no student had ever interrupted him before, alive or dead.

"Well," Said Professor Binns slowly, "yes, one could argue that, I suppose," he peered at Hermione as though he had never seen a student properly before. "However, the legend of which you speak is such a very sensational, even ludicrous tale--"

But the whole class was now hanging on Professor Binns's every word. He looked dimly at them all, every face turned to his. The twins could tell he was completely thrown by such an unusual show of interest.

"Oh very well," he said slowly. "Let me see...the Chamber of Secrets..."

"You all know, of course, that Hogwarts was founded over thousand of years ago--the precise date is uncertain--by the four greatest witches and wizards of the age. The four school Houses are named after them: Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin. They built this castle together, far from prying Muggles eyes, for it was an age when magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution."

He paused, gazed blearily around the room, and continued.

"For a few years, the founders worked in harmony together, seeking out youngsters who showed signs of magic and bringing them to the castle to be educated. But then disagreements sprang up between them. A rift began to grow between Slytherin and the others. Slytherin wished to be more selective about the students admitted to Hogwarts. He believed that magical learning should be kept within all-magic families. He disliked taking students of Muggle parentage, believing them to be untrustworthy. After a while, there was a serious argument on the subject between Slytherin and Gryffindor, and Slytherin left the school."

Professor Binns paused again, pursing his lips, looking like a wrinkled old tortoise.

"Reliable historical sources tell us this much," he said. "But these honest facts have been obscured by the fanciful legend of the Chamber of Secrets. The story goes that Slytherin had built a hidden chamber in the castle, of which the other founders knew nothing.

"Slytherin, according to the legend, sealed the Chamber of Secrets so that non would be able to open it until his own true heir arrived at the school. The heir alone would be able to unseal the Chamber of Secrets, unleash the horror within, and use it to purge the school of all who were unworthy to study magic."

There was silence as he finished telling the story, but it wasn't the usual, sleepy silence that filled Professor Binns's classes. There was

unease in the air as everyone continued to watch him, hoping for more. Professor Binns looked faintly annoyed.

"The whole thing is arrant nonsense, of course," he said, "Naturally, the school has been searched for evidence of such a chamber, many times, by the most learned witches and wizards. It does not exist. A tale told to frighten the gullible."

Hermione's hand was back in the air.

"Sir--what exactly do you mean by the 'horror within' the Chamber?"

"That is believed to be some sort of monster, which the heir of Slytherin alone can control," Professor Binns answered in his dry, reedy voice.

The class exchanged nervous looks.

"I tell you, the thing does not exist," said Professor Binns, shuffling his notes. "There is no Chamber and no monster."

"But sir," Said Seamus Finnigan, "If the Chamber can only be opened by Slytherin's true heir, no one else would be able to find it, would they?"

"Nonsense, O'Flaherty," Said Professor Binns in an aggravated tone. "If a long succession of Hogwarts headmasters and head mistresses haven't found the thing--"

"But, Professor," Piped up Parvati Patil, "You'd probably have to use dark Magic to open it--"

"Just because a wizard doesn't use Dark Magic doesn't mean he can't, Miss Pennyfeather," snapped Professor Binns. "I repeat, if the likes of Dumbledore--"

"But maybe you've got to be related to Slytherin, so Dumbledore couldn't--" began Dean Thomas, but Professor Binns had had enough.

"That will do," he said sharply, "It is a myth! It does not exist! There is not a shred of evidence that Slytherin ever built so much as a secret broom cupboard! I regret telling you such a foolish story! We will return, if you please, to history, to solid, believable, verifiable fact!"

And within five minutes, the class had sunk back into its usual torpor.

"I always knew Salazar Slytherin was a twisted old loony," Ron told Harry, Hally, and Hermione as they fought their way through the teeming corridors at the end of the lesson to drop off their bags before dinner. "But I never knew he started all this pure-blood stuff. I wouldn't be in his house if you paid me. Honestly, if the Sorting Hat had tried to put me in Slytherin, I'd've got the train straight back home..."

Hermione nodded fervently, but Harry and Hally didn't say anything. Their stomachs had just dropped unpleasantly.

They never told Ron and Hermione that the Sorting Hat had seriously considered putting Harry into Slytherin, and deliberately put Hally into Gryffindor for Harry's sake. They both could remember as though it were yesterday, the small voice that had spoken in their ears when they had placed the hat on their heads a year before.

you could be great you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin would help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that...

No, no Your father can manage on his own, another will need you and Slytherin is not the place for you...

But Harry had already heard of Slytherin house's reputation for turning out Dark wizards, had thought desperately, Not Slytherin! and the hat had said, Oh well, if you're sure...better be Gryffindor...

Hally on the other hand knew about Slytherin House's reputation, simply by years before starting Hogwarts and wanted it so badly, but the hat told her. "No, not there...Gryffindor..."

As they were shunted along in the throng, Colin Creevy went past.

"Hiya Harry! Hiya Hally!"

"Hullo Colin," Harry and Hally said automatically

"Harry, Hally--a boy in my class has been saying you're--"

But Colin was so small he couldn't fight against the tide of people bearing him toward the Great Hall; they heard him squeak, "See you Harry, Hally!" and he was gone.

"What's a boy in his class saying about you two?" Hermione wondered

"That we're Slytherin's heirs we expect," Harry and Hally said, their stomachs dropping another inch or so as they suddenly remembered the way Justin Finch-Fletchley had run away from them at lunchtime.

"People here'll believe anything," Ron said in disgust.

The crowd thinned and they were able to climb the next staircase without difficulty.

"D'you really think there's a Chamber of Secrets?" Ron asked Hermione

"I don't know," she said, frowning. "Dumbledore couldn't cure Mrs. Norris, and that makes me think that whatever attacked her might not be--well--human."

Hally stepped in front of Hermione just then. "Hermione Granger...wait...what?" she asked suddenly in surprise.

"I said that whatever did that to Mrs. Norris might not have been human," Hermione answered looking slyly at Harry

"Oh, sorry I thought you meant something else. My minds been wandering off again...Shut up Ron not one word from you!" Hally warned after seeing Ron stifle a snigger

"Sorry Hally, but lately you have been...in another world of your own," Ron grinned

Harry narrowed his eyes at his twin sister, "Yeah! I've noticed it too, and your link had been closed lately, what have you been thinking about lately Hal?" Harry questioned

Hally shifted her feet, looking down at the floor after seeing the look of disgust on Harry's face, "OH GROSS! ARE YOU INSANE? Thinking about..."

"Harry Please!" Hally begged her brother with pleading eyes

"Thinking about what Harry?" Ron asked with interest, wanting to know himself. Hermione simply waited for an answer

"It's nothing Ron. Hal just has to get a grip on some things, don't you Hal?" Harry asked his twin with a stern face.

"Yeah Harry I do, I'm sorry." Hally blushed lightly stepping aside for Hermione so they could continue on to where they were going.

They turned a corner and found themselves at the end of the very corridor where the attack had happened. They stopped and looked. The scene was just as it had been that night, except that there was no stiff cat hanging from the torch bracket, and an empty chair stood against the wall bearing the message "The chamber of Secrets has been Opened."

"That's where Filch has been keeping guard," Ron muttered.

They looked at each other. The corridor was deserted.

"Can't hurt to have a poke around," said Harry, dropping his bag and getting to his hands and knees so that he could crawl along, searching for clues. Hally decided to join him by doing the same.

"Scorch marks!" He said. "Here--and here--"

"Come and look at this!" Hermione called to them both. "This is funny..."

Harry and Hally got up and crossed to the window next to the message on the wall. Hermione was pointing at the topmost pane, where around twenty spiders were scuttling, apparently fighting to get through a small crack. A long, silvery thread was dangling like a rope, as though they had all climbed it in their hurry to get outside.

"Have you ever seen spiders act like that?" Hermioned asked in wonder

"No," Harry and Hally answered simultaneously. "Have you Ron? Ron?"

They looked over their shoulders. Ron was standing well back and seemed to be fighting the impulse to run.

"What's up?" Harry enquired suddenly

"I--don't--like--spiders," said Ron tensely.

"I never knew that," Hermione commented, looking at Ron in surprise. "You've used spiders in Potions loads of times..."

"I don't mind them dead," Ron said, who was carefully looking anywhere but at the window, "I just don't like the way they move..."

Hermione and Hally bursted into fitfull of giggles.

"It's not funny," Said Ron fiercely. "If you must know, when I was three, Fred turned my--my teddy bear into a great big filthy spider because I broke his toy broomstick...you wouldn't like them either if you'd been holding your bear and suddenly it had too many legs and..."

He broke off, shuddering. Hermione and Hally was obviously still trying not to laugh. Feeling they had better get off the subject, Harry said, "Remember all that water on the floor? Where did that come from? Someone's mopped it up."

"It was about here," Said Ron, recovering himself to walk a few paces past Filch's chair and pointing. "Level with this door."

He reached for the brass doorknob but suddenly withdrew his hand as though he'd been burned. Once again both girls started giggling while Harry crossed his arms grinning evilly.

"What's the matter?" Harry asked

"Can't go in there," said Ron gruffly. "That's a girls' toilet."

Hally and Hermione both rolled their eyes at him. "Oh, Ron, there won't be anyone in there," Hermione told him standing up and coming over. "That's Moaning Myrtle's place. Come on, let's have a look."

And ignoring the large OUT OF ORDER sign, she opened the door.

It was the gloomiest , most depressing bathroom Harry had ever set foot in. Under a large, cracked, and spotted mirror were a row of chipped sinks. The floor was damp and reflected the dull light given off by the stubs of a few candles, burning low in their holders; the wooden doors to the stalls were flaking and scratched and one of them was dangling off its hinges.

Hermione put her fingers to her lips and set off toward the end stall. When she reached it she said, "Hello, Myrtle, how are you?"

Harry and Ron went to look while Hally waited patiently. Moaning Myrtle was floating above the tank of the toilet, picking a spot on her chin.

"This is a girls' bathroom," she said, eyeing Ron and Harry suspiciously. "They're not girls."

"No," Hermione agreed. "I just wanted to show them how--er--nice it is in here."

She waved vaguely at the dirty old mirror and the damp floor.

"Ask her if she saw anything," Harry mouthed at Hermione

"What are you whispering?" Myrtle asked, staring right at Harry.

"Nothing," said Harry quickly. "We wanted to ask--"

"I wish people would stop talking behind my back!" said Myrtle, in a voice choked with tears. "I do have feelings, you know, even if I am dead--"

"Myrtle, no one wants you," Said Hermione. "Harry only--"

"No one wants to upset me! That's a good one!" Howled Myrtle. Hally rolled her eyes while shaking her head at the ghost. "My life was nothing but misery at this place and now people come along ruining my death!"

"Well we wouldn't if you get that big fat stick out of your ghostly butt Myrtle!" Hally shouted finally, highly irritated over Myrtles complaints.

"Hal stop it! We wanted to ask you if you've seen anything funny lately," said Hermione quickly. "Because a cat was attacked right outside your own front door on Halloween."

"Did you see anyone near here that night?" Harry asked

"I wasn't paying attention," Said Myrtle dramatically. "Peeves upset me so much I came in here and tried to kill myself. Then, of course, I remembered that I'm--that I'm--"

"Dead as a doorknob, go on," Hally waved her hand in gestures

"Hal!" Harry warned "Already dead," said Ron helpfully.

Myrtle gave a tragic sob, rose up in the air, turned over, and dived headfirst into the toilet, splashing water all over them and vanishing from sight, although from the direction of her muffled sobs, she had come to rest somewhere in the U-bend.

"THANKS FOR THE SHOWER PIMPLY PUSS!" Hally bellowed out

"HALLY!" Harry, Hermione and Ron exclaimed in shock as Myrtle let out a louder moaning sob

"Well...she had no right to splash us like that...ruining her death...if anyone if ruining it, it's her!" Hally nodded at the toilet

Harry and Ron stood with their mouths open, but Hermione shrugged wearily and said, "Honestly, that was almost cheerful for Myrtle though...come on let's go."

Harry had barely closed the door on Myrtle's gurgling sobs when a loud voice made all four of them jump.

"RON!"

Percy Weasley had stopped dead at the head of the stairs, prefect badge agleam, an expression of complete shock on his face.

"That's a girls' bathroom!" He gasped. "What were you--?"

"Just having a look around," Ron shrugged. "Clues, you know--"

Percy swelled in a manner that reminded Harry and Hally forcefully of Mrs. Weasley.

"Get--away--from--there--" Percy said, striding toward them and starting to bustle along, flapping his arms. "Don't you care what this looks like? Coming back here while everyone's at dinner--"

"Why shouldn't we be here?" Said Ron hotly, stopping short and glaring at Percy. "Listen, we never laid a finger on that cat!"

"That's what I told Ginny," Percy said fiercely, "but she still seems to think you're going to be expelled, I've never seen her so upset, crying her eyes out, you might think of her, all the first years are thoroughly overexcited by this business--"

"You don't care about Ginny," said Ron, whose ears were now reddening. "You're just worried I'm going to mess up your chances of being Head Boy--"

"Five points from Gryffindor!" Percy said tersely, fingering his prefect badge. "And I hope it teaches you a lesson! No more detective work or I'll write to Mum!"

And he strode off, the back of his neck as red as Ron's ears.

Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione chose seats as far away as possible from Percy in the common room that night. Ron was still in a very bad temper and kept blotting his Charms homework. When he reached absently for his wand to remove the smudges, it ignited the parchment. Fuming almost as much as his homework, Ron slammed The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2 shut. To Harry and Hally's surprise, Hermione followed suit.

"Who can it be though?" She said in a quiet voice, as though continuing a conversation they had just been having. "Who'd want to frighten all the Squibs and Muggle-borns out of Hogwarts?"

"Let's think," said Ron in mock puzzlement. "Who do we know who thinks Muggle-borns are scum?"

Both twins watched as he looked at Hermione. Hermione looked back, unconvinced.

"If you're talking about Malfoy--"

"Of course I am!" said Ron. "You heard him--'You'll be next, Mudbloods!'--come on, you've only got to look at his foul rat face to know it's him--"

"Malfoy, the heir of Slytherin?" said Hermione skeptically.

"Look at his family," said Harry, closing his books, too. Hally listened to them quietly, keeping her eyes down. "The whole lot of them have been in Slytherin; he's always boasting about it. They could easily be Slytherin's descendants. His father's definitely evil enough."

"And what does that make our dad Harry hmm?" Hally suddenly questioned her older brother

"Dad was a Slytherin, are you going to suspect him like you did last year as well?" Hally drilled.

"Now Hal, that wasn't what I meant..."

Hally got up from the table, "Thing is, we hang around with the Slytherins, but haven't lately on account of this whole scenario, but putting a blame on someone just because their whole family was Slytherins? Heh, Harry you'll still have much to learn if you think that," Hally spoke out in a quiet tone before heading to the other side of the Gryffindor common room, sitting down.

"Oh man," Ron muttered, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Um Harry...", "I know Mione, I'll go talk to my sister," Harry sighed, leaving the table.

He sat down beside Hally on the sofa. "Look Hal...(sigh) your right, I shouldn't jump to conclusions, we'll look into it better the next time okay?" he asked Hally in a whisper

"Okay," Hally answered quietly

"Come on Hal, it's not the same without you over there," Harry urged leading the way back to where Ron and Hermione were.

They walked into one heavy discussion.

"They could've had the key to the Chamber of Secrets for centuries!" said Ron to Hermione. "Handing it down, father to son..."

"Well," Hermione said cautiously. "I suppose it's possible..."

"Can you prove that Ron?" Hally questioned the red-haired boy with a raised eyebrow

"Well...no but..."

"But how do we prove it?" said Harry darkly to Ron

"There might be a way," said Hermione slowly, dropping her voice still further with a quick glance across the room at Percy. "Of course, it would be difficult. And dangerous, very dangerous. We'd be breaking about fifty school rules, I expect--"

"Well it's not like Ron hasn't had us break any before, isn't that right orby?" Hally asked Ron in a tease.

Ron chose to ignore her, his ears turning pink. "If, in a month or so, you feel like explaining, you will let us know, won't you?" asked Ron irritably

"All right," said Hermione in a cold manner. "What we'd need to do is to get inside the Slytherin common room on our own without Harry and Hally's invitation. Ask Malfoy a few questions without him realizing it's us...with the twin's help on that of course."

"But that's impossible," Harry shook his head as Ron laughed.

"No, it's not," said Hermione. "All we'd need would be some Polyjuice Potion."

"What's that?" Ron asked while Harry turned to his twin sister a grin spreading wide across his face.

"Professor Snape mentioned it in class a few weeks ago--"

"Oh Hal," Harry grinned evilly

"D'you think we've got nothing better to do in Potions than listen to Professor Snape--why are you looking at Hally like that Harry?" Ron asked with wide eyes.

"I'm not making that potion," Hally declined

"Come on Hal," Harry pleaded

"What does it do exactly?" Ron asked Hermione while keeping his eyes on the twins

"It transforms you into somebody else. Think about it! We could change into three or four of the Slytherins. No one would know it was us. Malfoy would probably tell us anything. He's probably boasting about it in the Slytherin common room right now, if only we could hear him." Hermione explained watching the twins as well

"I said no, I am not making that potion," Hally told the three

"The Polyjuice stuff sounds a bit dodgy to me," said Ron, feigning a frown and getting Hally angry, knowing that she would probably will able to make it with her eyes closed. "What if we were stuck looking like four of the Slytherins forever?"

"It doesn't do that Ron Weasley, it wears off after a bit and I have you know that I can make that Potion with my one hand tied behind my back...oh no Harry! I already told you that I wasn't going to do it..."

"You don't have to take it yourself Hal, just be a look out with Blaise. Just let us do the rest," Harry reasoned in low key

Hally stared at her brother, Ron and Hermione who was staring back at her grinning from ear to ear. "Mmm...fine, but when it starts to wear off, you two had better make a beeline out of Slytherin, Harry on the other hand...he can find a way out of a sticky situation on his own if he's confronted with Malfoy." Hally sighed in defeat.

"It will wear off after a while," Hermione assured Ron, waving her hand impatiently. "But if it's alright with Hally here, I'd like to get a hold of that recipe since it is very difficult. Professor Snape said it was in a book called Moste Potente Potions and it's bound to be in the restricted Section of the library."

There was only one way to get a book from the Restricted Section: You needed a signed not of Permission from a teacher.

"Hard to see why we'd want the book, really if Hally has a fantastic memory," said Ron, "If we weren't going to try and make one of the Potions."

"I think," said Hermione, "That if we make it sound as though we were just interested in the theory, we might stand a chance..."

"Oh, come on, no teacher's going to fall for that...unless it's coming from Lady Hex here," Ron said then thought hard about it. "They really have to be thick headed."

The twins started to snigger, "They are, oh they are," Hally grinned evilly at Ron's comment.

A/N: That is all for now in chapter 20. See you in chapter 21 and yes I switched the potion making for Hally to do it instead, but the pussycat scene for Hermione will most definitely be there. Bye for now.

Chapter 21 THE ROGUE BLUDGER

Since the disastrous episode of the pixies, Professor Lockhart had not brought live creatures to class. Instead, he read passages from his books to them, and sometimes reenacted some of the more dramatic bits. One morning the students were waiting patiently for him, when Hally decided to have a bit of fun, teasing and tormenting Lockhart's portraits.

Hally stood beside one of the portraits, "could we say conceited? Oh Yes!" Hally called out loudly. Every boy within the classroom started to snigger while the girls looked at Hally as though she was mad.

"He's dreamy," Susan Bones sighed, Hally looked at the girl slyly

"And your nutters," Hally muttered, hearing laughter erupt from the boys.

Hally feigned swooning, "Kiss me big boy!" She cackled out along with the guys.

"Clearly this one isn't a fan," A portrait commented

"Survey says your right you great big fraud," Hally sneered at the portrait

The boys roared into laughter. "Finally, a girl who makes sense!" Dean Thomas, a fellow Gryffindor sniggered before they were all settling down minutes before Professor Lockhart walked into the classroom to start reading and reenacting his passages. He usually picked Harry or Hally to help him with the reconstructions, however, Hally would somehow manage to make sure the reconstruction would backfire, making Professor Lockhart the laughing stock inside the classroom. During one of the reconstructions, Harry would be forced to play a simple Transylvanian villager whom Lockhart had cured of a Babbling Curse, a yeti with a head cold, and a vampire who had been unable to eat anything except lettuce since Lockhart had dealt with him.

Today Harry was hauled to the front of the class as usual during their very next Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson, this time acting a werewolf. Hally decided to rescue her big brother from future reconstructions by getting help from several other students, unnoticeably passing a book to her. Harry kept a straight face, knowing what was about to happen to their Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor, and also thought that if he hadn't had a very good reason for keeping Lockhart in a good mood after this, he would have refused to do it.

"Nice loud howl, Harry—exactly—and then, if you'll believe it, I pounced—like this—slammed him to the floor—thus—with one hand, I managed to hold him down—with my other, I put my wand to his throat—I then screwed up my remaining strength and performed the immensely complex Homorphus Charm—he let out a piteous moan—go on, Harry—higher than that—good—the fur vanished—the fangs shrank—and he turned back into a man. Simple, yet effective—and another village will remember me forever as the hero who delivered them from the monthly terror of werewolf attacks..."

"saglasia diem cavemanius!" Hally muttered one of hers and Harry's own special charm onto Professor Lockhart.

Before everyone's eyes, Professor Lockhart's arm began to lengthen, sagging past his knees down to the floor to where the weight made Professor Lockhart bend forward for balance.

"I say...Ugh! Unga Bunga Mif!" Lockhart exclaimed in front of the class. Harry started to cackle with the entire class over the sight.

Hally raised her hand, her face full of innocence. "Excuse me Professor, but we didn't quite hear that, what did you just say?" Hally asked the Dark Arts Professor

"Unga Bunga Mif! Ooga Booga!" Lockhart cried out

More laughter erupted from the students. The bell finally rang out ending their class. The students were holding their stomachs laughing while they seen Lockhart try his best to stop them, but watched as his arms swung around like a jungle vine.

“Hal, we better get out of here before we’re caught,” Harry sniggered after grabbing his satchel.

“Bunga Mif! Bunga Mif!” Lockhart ranted

“What was that Professor? No homework? All right! Isn’t Lockhart the best teacher everyone!” Hally yelled out as she and Harry met up with Ron and Hermione at the back of the classroom.

“Ready?” Harry muttered to the two, still sniggering over the Lockhart situation

“Wait til everyone’s gone...are you sure that this is the best time to get a written permission from him?” Hermione enquired

“Absolutely, besides he won’t be able to say...too much,” Hally giggled

“Um...right,” Hermione simply said nervously.

They approached Lockhart’s desk, a piece of paper clutched tightly in Hermione’s hand, Harry, Hally, and Ron right behind her.

“Er—Professor Lockhart?” Hermione stammered. “I wanted to—to get this book out of the library. Just for background reading.” She held out the piece of paper, her hand shaking slightly. “But the thing is, it’s in the restricted section of the library, so I need a teacher to sign for it—I’m sure it would help me understand what you say in Gadding with Ghouls about how slow-acting venoms—

“Ooga! Unga Bunga!” Lockhart’s eyes went wide for trying to speak in a normal fashion.

“Oh for Merlin’s sake,” Harry uttered under his breath and walking behind Lockhart, ending the twin’s own special charm

“Professor?” Hermione enquired innocently

"I said...good heavens I'm fine...ahem, Ah, Gadding with Ghouls!" said Lockhart, taking the note from Hermione and smiling widely at her. "Possibly my very favorite book. You enjoyed it?"

"Oh yes," Hermione answered eagerly. "So clever, the way you trapped that last one with the tea-strainer—"

"Well, I'm sure no one will mind me giving the best student of the year a little extra help," Lockhart said warmly, and he pulled out an enormous peacock quill. "Yes, nice, isn't it?" he said, misreading the revolted look on Ron's face. "I usually save it for book-signings."

He scrawled an enormous loopy signature on the note and handed it back to Hermione.

"So Harry, Hally," Lockhart said, while Hermione folded the note with fumbling fingers and slipped it into her bag. "Tomorrow's the first Quidditch match of the season, I believe? Gryffindor against Slytherin, is it not? Your father's own house, I hear you two are useful players. I was a Seeker, too. I was asked to try for the National Squad, but preferred to dedicate my life to the eradication of the Dark Forces. Still, if ever you two feel the need for a little private training, don't hesitate to ask. Always happy to pass on my expertise to less able players...."

The twins made an indistinct noise in their throats and then hurried off after Ron and Hermione, but not before Hally waited for Lockhart to turn his back on them, spurring out another one of their charms for extra measure as well as entertainment for the rest of the day.

"Animanius," Hally muttered with an evil grin on her face before slipping out of sight along with her brother.

"I swear Hal, you'll going to get us caught if you aren't too careful," Harry commented with a snigger

"Well, he asked for it Harry. Big time," Hally grinned as the four walked together down the corridor.

"I don't believe it," Harry said as the four of them examined the signature on the note. "He didn't even look at the book we wanted."

"Told you he was too conceited Harry," Hally giggled

"Yeah, well that's because he's a brainless git," Ron said. "But who cares, we've got what we needed—"

"He is not a brainless git," Hermione said shrilly as they half ran toward the library.

"Just because he said you were the best student of the year—"

They dropped their voices as they entered the muffled stillness of the library. Madam Pince, the librarian, was a thin, irritable woman who looked like an underfed vulture.

"Moste Potente Potions?" she repeated suspiciously, trying to take the note from Hermione; but Hermione wouldn't let go.

"I was wondering if I could keep it," she said breathlessly.

"Oh come on," Said Ron. Wrenching it from her grasp and thrusting it at Madam Pince. "We'll get you another autograph. Lockhart'll sign anything if it stands still long enough."

Madam Pince held the note up to the light, as though determined to detect a forgery, but it passed the test. She stalked away between the lofty shelves and returned several minutes later carrying a large and moldy-looking book. Hermione put it carefully into her bag and they left, trying not to walk too quickly or look too guilty.

Five minutes later, they were barricaded in Moaning Myrtle's out-of-order bathroom once again. Hermione had overridden Ron's objections by pointing out that it was the last place anyone in their right minds would go, so they were guaranteed some privacy while Hally got started to work on the Polyjuice Potion. Moaning Myrtle was crying noisily in her stall, but they were ignoring her, and she them.

Hermione opened Moste Potente Potions carefully for Hally, and the four of them bent over the damp-spotted pages. It was clear to the other three from a glance on why it belonged in the Restricted Section. Some of the potions had effects almost too gruesome to think about, and there were some very unpleasant illustrations, which included a man who seemed to have been turned inside out and a witch sprouting several extra pairs of arms out of her head.

"Here it is," said Hermione excitedly as she found the page headed The Polyjuice Potion. It was decorated with drawings of people halfway through transforming into other people. Harry sincerely the artist had imagined the looks of intense pain on their faces.

Hally seemed to read her brother's thoughts, "It's not actually like that Harry, there isn't much pain..."

"How would you know about that Hally?" Ron asked her with wide eyes

"I've taken it several times before, switching places with our dad's houseelves at home," Hally answered truthfully. Ron moved slightly away from the raven-red-streak-haired girl at that moment

"Aww, what's the matter? Did wittle Ronnikins get a scare over wittle me telling you that I've had the Polyjuice Potion before?" Hally teased at the red-haired boy

"Stop calling me that! I hate it..."

"Knock it off! Both of you!" Harry intervened, stopping the two before a fight broke out between Ron and his little sister.

"This is the most complicated potion I've ever seen," said Hermione as they scanned the recipe. "Lacewing flies, leeches, fluxweed, and knotgrass," she murmured, running her finger down the list of ingredients. "Well, they're easy enough, they're in the student store-cupboard, we can help ourselves....Oooh, look, powdered horn of a bicorn—don't know where we're going to get that—shredded skin of a boomslang—that'll be tricky, too—and of course a bit of whoever we

want to change into...How could you drink this Hally?" Hermione finally asked with a wrinkled nose.

"By not thinking how nasty it would be," Hally shrugged her shoulders with a grin on her face

"Excuse me?" said Ron sharply. "What d'you mean, a bit of whoever we're changing into? I'm drinking nothing with Crabbe's toenails in it—

The girls continued as though they hadn't heard Ron.

"You won't have to worry about that yet, though, because you'll add those bits last..."

Ron turned, speechless to Harry, who had another worry.

"D'you realize how much we're going to have to steal, girls? Shredded skin of boomslang, that's definitely not in the student's cupboard. What're we going to do, break into Professor Snape's private stores? I don't know if this is a good idea..."

Hally let Hermione shut the book with a snap.

"Well, if you are going to chicken out, fine," Hermione said. There were bright pink patches on her cheeks and her eyes were brighter than usual. "I don't want to break the rules, you know. I think threatening Muggle-borns is far worse than having Hally brew up a difficult potion. But if you don't want to find out if it's Malfoy, I'll go straight to Madam Pince now and hand this book back in..."

"I never thought I'd see the day when you'd be persuading us to break rules," said Ron. "All right, I'll do it. But not toenails, okay?"

"How long will it take to make, anyway?" Harry asked as Hermione, looking happier, opened the book again.

"Well, since the fluxweed has got to be picked at the full moon and the laceflies have got to be stewed for twenty-one days...I'd say it'd be ready in about a month, if we can get all the ingredients."

"That won't be a problem...for Harry and myself that is. But if you want it done like it shows in the book, then it's okay by me...Me personally, I'd go for the faster version that I had perfected to last longer....,"

"Hal," Harry warned, shaking his head

"Fine, a month it is...so sue me Harry," Hally grinned at her brother before giving him a raspberry.

"A month?" Ron asked. "Malfoy could have attacked half the Muggle-borns in the school by then!" But Hermione's eyes narrowed dangerously again, and he added swiftly, "But it's the best plan we've got, so full steam ahead, I say."

However, while Hermione and Hally were checking that the coast was clear for them to leave the bathroom, Ron muttered to Harry, "It'll be a lot less hassle if you can just knock Malfoy off his broom tomorrow instead."

The twins woke early on Saturday Morning inside their spare bedroom within Severus's living quarters, laying for a while thinking about the coming Quidditch match. They were nervous, mainly at the thought of what Wood would say if Gryffindor lost, but also at the idea of facing their friends on the opposite team, who would be mounted on the fastest racing brooms gold could buy. They looked at each other grinning from ear to ear, knowing that their Slytherin friends were in for a very big surprise when they see them with their very own Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones. They had never wanted to beat Slytherin so badly until that day after seeing Draco Malfoy as the new Slytherin Seeker. After half an hour and taking turns inside their bathroom to get dressed and ready, they went down for breakfast with Severus early as usual, where they found the rest of the Gryffindor team huddled at the long, empty table, all looking uptight and not speaking much. Fred and George Weasley looked up with wide eyes as the twins came up to them with two sets of brooms each...Their Nimbus Two Thousand and also their Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones.

"Make it quick you two," Severus spoke to them in low key as he headed toward the teacher's table.

"Uh, uh..."

"Whoever likes our dad say Gryffindor Rules," the twins grinned at their team

Wood pointed at their new brooms, "Now how in the...your dad? Snape got those for your two?" he asked in surprise

"Yep, and our other ones goes to Fred and George," the twins answered

"Team, I can only say is now it will be fair," Wood almost hooted cheerfully as they gathered around the twins, admiring the new brooms.

The slytherin Quidditch team had just walked into the Great Hall, Draco in the front. They noticed the twins turning around grinning at them deviously.

"So uh...what was that about Cleansweep brooms? Oh that's right Malfoy, these would be so much better huh?" Harry and Hally sneered at the platinum-blond boy

Draco glared at the two, "Where did you get those?" he demanded

"Why Malfoy, our dad of course. See you on the field," Harry answered with a meaning to his words

Flint shrugged his shoulders, and simply went past clapping Harry on the back and ruffling Hally's hair slightly with a grin. The rest of the team following suit, Draco glared at the twins before following his team to their table, fuming in anger.

"Nice try Malfoy," Hally called out to him, the Gryffindor team sniggering at her remark.

As eleven o'clock approached, the whole school started to make its way down to the Quidditch stadium. It was a muggy sort of day with a hint of thunder in the air. Ron and Hermione came hurrying over to wish the twins good luck as they entered the locker rooms. The team pulled on their scarlet Gryffindor robes, then sat down to listen to Wood's usual pre-match pep talk.

"Slytherin started out with better broom, but now we are almost even," he began. "No point denying it. But we've also got better people on those brooms. We've trained harder than they have, we've been flying in all weathers--" ("Too true," muttered George Weasley. "I haven't been properly dry since August") "--and we're going to make them rue the day they let that little bit of slime, Malfoy, buy his way onto their team."

Chest heaving with emotion, Wood turned to Harry and Hally.

"It'll be down to you Harry, to show them that a Seeker has to have something more than a rich father, and you Hally have to show the the same as being a catcher. Get to that Snitch before Malfoy or die trying, keep that Quaffle as long as you can, because we've got to win today, we've got to."

"So no pressure you two," said Fred, winking at the two.

As they walked out onto the pitch, a roar of noise greeted them; mainly cheers, because Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were anxious to see Slytherin beaten, but the Slytherins in the crowd made their boos and hisses heard, too, only for appearances towards the twins of course. Madam Hooch, the Quidditch teacher, asked Flint and Wood to shake hands, which they did, giving each other threatening stares and gripping rather harder than was necessary.

"On my whistle," said Madam Hooch. "Three...two...one..."

With a roar from the crowd to speed them upward, the fourteen players rose toward the leaden sky. Harry flew higher than any of them, squinting around for the Snitch. Hally took hold of the Quaffle just before the opposite team got a hold of it.

"All right there, scarhead?" Yelled Malfoy, shooting underneath Harry as though to show off the speed that their brooms held.

Harry had no time to reply. At that very moment, a heavy black Bludger came pelting toward him; he avoided it so narrowly that he felt it ruffle his hair as it passed.

"Close one, Harry!" said George, streaking past him with his club in his hand, ready to knock the Bludger back toward Slytherin. Harry saw George give the Bludger a powerful wrack in the direction of Adrian Pucey, but the Bludger then went after Hally instead.

"Hally look out!" Fred cried out his warning. Hally turned her head just in time to move out of the way swiftly, dodging from the Bludger by mere inches. Fred wracked the Bludger towards Adrain Pucey, and it started to head straight back towards Harry again.

Harry dropped quickly to avoid it, and George managed to hit it hard toward Malfoy. Once again, the Bludger swerved like a boomerang and shot at Harry's head.

Harry put on a burst of speed and zoomed toward the other end of the pitch. He could hear the Bludger whistling along behind him. What was going on? Bludgers never concentrated on one or two players like this; it was their job to try and unseat as many people as possible...

Fred Weasley was waiting for the Bludger at the other end. Harry ducked as Fred swung at the Bludger with all his might; the Bludger was knocked of course.

"Gotcha!" Fred yelled happily, but he was wrong; as though it was magnetically attracted to them, The Bludger pelted right after Hally for the second time, and Harry and Fred were forced to fly off after it at full speed.

They had got to Hally in the nick of time, with Fred swinging at the Bludger, knocking it off course as it headed right back toward Harry closing in on him while He sped away.

It had started to rain; Harry felt heavy drops fall onto his face, splattering onto his head. He didn't have a clue what was going on in the rest of the game until he heard Lee Jordan, who was commentating, say, "Slytherin lead, sixty points to zero--"

The Slytherins brooms were clearly doing their jobs like Harry and Hally's, and meanwhile the mad Bludger was doing all it could to know either twin out of the air. Fred and George were now flying so close to either twin, that Harry could see nothing at all except their flailing arms and had no chance to look for the Snitch, let alone catch it.

"Someone's--tampered--with--this--Bludger--" Fred grunted swinging his bat with all his might at it as it launched a new attack on Harry.

"We need time out," said George, trying to signal to Wood and stop the Bludger breaking Harry's nose at the same time.

Wood had obviously got the message. Madam Hooch's whistle rang out and Harry, Fred, and George dived for the ground with Hally following suit, still trying to avoid the mad Bludger.

"What's going on?" Wood asked as the Gryffindor team huddled together, while Slytherins in the crowd jeered. "We're being flattened, Fred, George, where were you two when that Bludger stopped Angelins scoring?"

"We were twenty feet above her, stopping the other Bludger from murdering Harry and Hally here, Oliver," Said George angrily. "Someone's fixed it--it won't leave Harry or Hally alone...Harry more than anything. It hasn't gone for anyone else all game. The Slytherins must have done something to it."

"But the Bludgers have been locked in Madam Hooch's office since our last practice, and there was nothing wrong with them then..." said Wood, anxiously.

Madam Hooch was walking toward them. Over her shoulder, the twins could see the Slytherin team jeering and pointing in their direction.

"Listen," said Harry as she came nearer and nearer, "With you two flying around us all the time the only way I'm going to catch the Snitch is if it flies up my sleeve. Go back to the rest of the team and let me and Hal deal with the rogue one."

"Don't be thick," Said Fred. "It'll take your heads off."

Wood was looking from Harry and Hally to the Weasleys.

"Oliver, this is insane," said Alicia Spinnet angrily. "You can't let Harry or Hally deal with that thing on their own. Let's ask for an inquiry--"

"If we stop now, we'll have to forfeit the match!" said both twins "And we're not losing to Slytherin just because of a crazy Bludger! Not even for our dad! Come on, Oliver, tell them to leave us alone!"

"This is all your fault," George said angrily to Wood. " 'Get the Snitch or die trying,' 'Keep hold of the Quaffle as long as you can,' what a stupid thing to tell them--"

Madam Hooch had joined them.

"Ready to resume play?" she asked Wood.

Wood looked at the determined looks on the twins's faces.

"All right," he said. "Fred, George, you heard them--leave them alone and let them deal with the Bludger on their own."

The rain was falling more heavily now. On Madam Hooch's whistle, Harry and Hally kicked hard into the air and hear the telltale whoosh of the Bludger behind them. Higher and higher Harry climbed separating from his sister and taking the Bludger safely away from her; he looped and swooped, spiraled, zigzagged, and rolled. Slightly dizzy, he nevertheless kept his eyes wide open, rain was pelting down onto his face, and ran up his nostrils as he hung upside down, avoiding another fierce dive from the Bludger. He could hear laughter from the crowd; he knew he must look very stupid, but the rogue Bludger was heavy and couldn't change direction as quickly as Harry

could; he began a kind of roller-coaster ride around the edges of the stadium, squinting through the silver sheets of rain to the Gryffindor goal posts, where Adrian Pucey was trying to get past Wood--

A whistling in Harry's ear told him the Bludger had just missed him again; he turned right over and sped in the opposite direction.

"Training for the ballet, Potter?" yelled Malfoy as Harry was forced to do a stupid kind of twirl in midair to dodge the Bludger, and he fled, the Bludger trailing a few feet behind him; and then, glaring back at Malfoy in hatred, he saw it--the Golden Snitch. It was hovering inches above Malfoy's left ear--and Malfoy, busy laughing at Harry, hadn't seen it.

For an agonizing moment, Harry hung in midair, not daring to speed toward Malfoy in case he looked up and saw the Snitch.

WHAM.

He stayed still a second too long, he then heard his little sister Hally let out a wailing scream of pain. The Bludger had hit him at last, smashed into his elbow, and Harry felt his arm break. Dimly, dazed by the searing pain in his arm, he slid sideways on his rain-drenched broom, one knee still crooked over it, his right arm dangling useless at his side--the Bludger came pelting back for a second attack, this time aiming at his face--Harry swerved out of the way, one idea firmly lodged in his numb brain: get to Malfoy.

Through a haze of rain and pain he dived for the shimmering, sneering face below him and saw its eyes widen with fear: Malfoy thought Harry was attacking him.

"What the--" he gasped, careening out of Harry's way.

Harry took his remaining hand off his broom and made a wild snatch; he felt his fingers close on the cold Snitch but was now only gripping the broom with his legs, and there was a yell from the crowd as he headed straight for the ground, trying hard not to pass out.

With a splattering thud he hit the mud and rolled off his broom. There not too far from him, laid Hally, clutching her right arm as though she was in great pain. His arm was hanging at a very strange angle; riddled with pain, he heard, as though from a distance, a good deal of whistling and shouting. He focused on the Snitch clutched in his good hand.

"Aha," he said vaguely, "we've won."

And at the very same time, both twins fainted.

They both came around, rain falling on their faces, still lying on the field, someone leaning over them both. They saw a glitter of teeth.

"Get away from me you conceited fraud!" Hally hissed through her pain

"Oh no, not you," Harry moaned.

"Doesn't know what they're saying," said Lockhart loudly to the anxious crowd as Severus was striding toward them in concern for the twins. "Not to worry Harry, Hally. I'm about to fix your arms."

"OH NO YOU WON'T!" Hally shrieked with wide eyes

"No!" said Harry. "I'll keep it like this, thanks..."

They both tried to sit up, but the pain was terrible for them. Both the Slytherin team and The Gryffindor team had gathered around, murmuring to each other. "Hally didn't get hit, but her arm is broken too? Wow, they really are connected," several whispered quietly

They heard a familiar clicking noise nearby.

"We don't want a photo of this Colin," The twins said loudly.

"Lie back Harry, Hally," said Lockhart soothingly. "It's a simple charm I've used countless times...Hmm, maybe if I took care of Harry's arm, your arm will be better perhaps Hally? let's give it a try--"

"Look! Why can't we just go to the hospital wing?" Harry questioned through clenched teeth.

"They should really, Professor," said a muddy Wood, who couldn't help grinning even though his Seeker and catcher was both injured. "Great capture, Harry, really spectacular, your best yet, I'd say--"

Through the thickest of legs around them, the twins spotted Fred and George Wrestling the rogue Bludger into a box. It was still putting up a terrific fight.

"Stand back," Said Lockhart, who was rolling up his jade-green sleeves just as Severus got to them.

"DON'T YOU DARE..."

"No--don't--" said Harry weakly, but Lockhart was already twirling his wand and a second later had directed it straight at Harry's arm.

"GET AWAY FROM MY BROTHER YOU DIM WITTED JERK!" Hally screeched out, trying to knock Lockhart's wand out of his hand, but was too late.

A strange and unpleasant sensation started at the twin's shoulders and had spread all the way down to their fingertips. It felt as though their arm was being deflated. Harry didn't dare look, but Hally on the other hand did, and had let out a blood curdling scream that reached all the way into the stands. Harry shut his eyes, his face turned away from his arm, but his worse fears were realized as the people above him and his sister gasped and Colin Creevey began clicking away madly. Their arms didn't hurt anymore--nor did they feel remotely like an arm.

"Ah," said Lockhart. "Yes. Well, that can sometimes happen. But the point is, the bones are no longer broken. That's the thing to bear in mind. So, Harry, Hally. just toddle up to the hospital wing--ah, Mr. Weasley, Miss Granger, would you two escort them?--and Madam Pomfrey will be able to--er--tidy you two up a bit."

For Hally, that was the last straw. Right in front of both Quidditch teams, her brother Harry, and Severus came the most colorful words coming out of Hally's mouth.

"You dirty, rotten son of a "Beep!" no broken bones...you piece of bog "Beep!" You took out our bones! When we get out of the hospital wing, I'm going to be coming straight for you bloody "BeeP!" and make sure that your fraudulent butt don't try another "Beep!" thing like this again!" Hally swore loudly, hearing gasps coming from the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

"Did you hear what Hally just said?" their teammates whispered in shock

The Slytherins however, hooted cheers at Hally after hearing her give the Dark Arts professor a piece of her mind. Severus one side of his mouth twitch as he quickly tried to keep a straight face, highly amused of his daughter's lashing to Lockhart.

"All right Raven, that will be enough," He could only say as the twins got to their feet. They both felt strangely lopsided. Taking a deep breath, Harry looked down at his right side. What he saw nearly made him pass out again, but instead he threw glares Lockhart's way.

"Make that two of us coming for you Professor!" Harry seethed before looking down once more.

Poking out of the end of their robes, was what looked like thick flesh-colored rubber gloves. Harry tried to move his fingers. Nothing happened.

Lockhart hadn't mended the twin's bones. He had removed them.

Madam Pomfrey wasn't at all pleased.

"You two should have come straight to me!" she raged, holding up the sad, limp remainder of what, half an hour before, had been a working arm of Harry's. "I can mend bones in a second--but growing them back--"

"I'm going to rip that fraud's own arms off and feed them to the giant squid!" Hally yelled out, still angry at Lockhart.

"I know Hal. You will be able to, won't you?" Harry asked desperately.

"I'll be able to, certainly, but it will be painful...and no Miss Potter, you won't have to take anything since it wasn't cast on you, your brother will have to, but you will still have to remain here as well." Said Madam Pomfrey grimly, throwing Harry a pair of pajamas and tossing Hally a nightgown. "You'll both have to stay the night..."

Hermione and Ron were inside of each twin's helping them into their night attires. It took a while to stuff the rubbery, boneless arms into a sleeve.

"How can you stick up for Lockhart now, Hermione, eh?" Ron called through Harry's drawn curtain as he pulled Harry's limp fingers through the cuff. "If Harry and Hally had wanted deboning they would have asked."

"Anyone can make a mistake," said Hermione. "And it doesn't hurt anymore, does it you two?"

"No," said Harry and Hally, getting into their beds before Hermione and Ron opened to drawn curtains. "But they don't do anything else either."

They flung themselves onto their beds, their arms had flapped pointlessly.

Madam Pomfrey came over to them, holding a large bottle of something labeled skele-gro.

"You two are in for a rough night," Pomfrey said, pouring out a steaming beakerful and handing it to Harry. "Regrowing bones is a nasty business."

So was taking the skele-gro. It burned Harry's mouth and throat as it went down, making him cough and splutter. Hally let out a quick squeal of laughter over Harry's facial expressions until he gave her

an angry look. Still tut-tutting about dangerous sports and inept teachers, Madam Pomfrey retreated, leaving Ron and Hermione to help Harry gulp down some water.

"We won, though," said Ron, a grin breaking across his face. "That was some catch you made. Malfoy's face...he looked ready to kill..."

"I want to know how he fixed that Bludger," said Hermione darkly

"So do I," Hally agreed with the bush-haired girl

"Well, we can add that to the list of questions we'll ask him when we've taken the Polyjuice Potion," Harry replied, sinking back onto his pillows. "I hope it tastes better than this stuff..." He heard Hally snigger. "All right Hal, how bad is it?" he asked

"Bad, but it won't leave an after taste in your mouth Harry," Hally answered truthfully

"If it's got bits of Slytherins in it? You've got to be joking," Ron said

The door of the hospital wing burst open at that moment, Filthy and soaking wet, the rest of the Gryffindor team had arrived to see the twins, followed by the Slytherin team, except for Draco Malfoy.

"Unbelievable flying, Harry," said George. "I've just seen Marcus Flint here yelling at Malfoy. Something about having the Snitch on top of his head and not noticing. Malfoy didn't seem too happy."

Both twins blinked up at Flint in surprise. Flint simply shrugged his shoulder slightly. "Well, if he's going to a part of our team, he needs to pay attention to the game than sneering at Lord Hex here, which by the way, I was impressed with that play. Congratulations Lord Hex," Flint grinned over at Harry.

They had brought cakes, sweets, and bottles of pumpkin juice; they gathered around Harry and Hally's beds and were just getting started on what promised to be a good party when Madam Pomfrey came storming over, shouting, "This boy and girl needs rest, they got thirty-three bones to regrow! Out!OUT!"

And both twins were left along, with nothing to distract them from the stabbing pains in their limp arms.

Hours and hours later, Harry and Hally woke quite suddenly in the pitch blackness and each gave a small yelp of pain: their arms now felt full of large splinters. For a second, they thought that was what had woken them. Then, with a thrill of horror, they both realized that someone was sponging their foreheads in the dark.

"Get off!" they both said loudly, and then, "Dobby!"

The house-elf's goggling tennis ball eyes were peering at Harry and Hally through the darkness. A single tear was running down his long, pointed nose.

"Harry and Hally Potter came back to school," he whispered miserably. "Dobby warned and warned Harry and Hally Potter. Ah sir, Miss, why didn't you heed Dobby? Why didn't Harry and Hally Potter go back home when they missed the train?"

Hally slowly sat up in her bed while Harry heaved himself up on his pillows and pushed Dobby's sponge away.

"What're you doing here?" Harry asked. "And how did you know we missed the train?"

"That's is what I like to know,too," Hally glared at the house-elf

Dobby's lip trembled and the twins was seized by a sudden suspicion.

"It was you!" Harry said slowly. "You stopped the barrier from letting us through!"

"Why you sneaky little creep!" Hally seethed. "You was the one wasn't you?"

"Indeed yes sir, and miss," said Dobby, nodding his head vigorously, ears flapping. "Dobby hid and watched for Harry and Hally Potter and sealed the gateway and Dobby had to iron his hands afterward"--he

showed the twins ten long, bandaged fingers--"But Dobby didn't care, sir, miss, for he thought Harry and Hally Potter was safe, and never did Dobby dream that Harry and Hally Potter would get to school another way!"

He was rocking backward and forward, shaking his ugly head.

"Dobby was so shocked when he heard Harry and Hally Potter was back at Hogwarts, he let his master's dinner burn! Such a flogging Dobby never had, sir, miss..."

Hally leaned back onto her pillows while Harry slumped back onto his.

"You nearly got Ron, Hal and me expelled," Harry said fiercely. "You'd better get lost before my bones come back, Dobby, or I might strangle you."

Dobby smiled weakly.

"Dobby is used to death threats, sir. Dobby gets them five times a day at home."

He blew his nose on a corner of the filthy pillowcase he wore, looking so pathetic that Harry and Hally felt their anger ebb away in spite of themselves.

"Why d'you wear that thing, Dobby?" Harry asked cautiously

"Harry..."

"This, sir?" said Dobby, plucking at the pillowcase. "'Tis a mark of the house-elf's enslavement, sir. Dobby can only be freed if his masters present him with clothes, sir. The family is careful not to pass Dobby even a sock, sir, for then he would be free to leave their house forever."

"Some wizarding families Harry, take caution on not to free their house-elves just in case they feel the need to try and leave," Hally explained to her brother

Dobby mopped his bulging eyes and said suddenly, "Harry and Hally Potter must go home! Dobby thought his Bludger would be enough to make--"

"Why you...you..."

"Your Bludger?" Harry questioned, anger rising once more. "What d'you mean, your Bludger? You made that Bludger try to kill me and Hal?"

"Not kill you two, sir, never kill you two!" said Dobby, shocked. 'Dobby wants to save Harry and Hally Potter's lives! Dobby only wanted Harry and Hally Potter hurt enough to be sent home!"

"Rotten little creep," Hally muttered in anger

"Oh is that all?" Harry said angrily. "I don't suppose you're going to tell me why you wanted me and Hal sent home in pieces?"

"Ah, if Harry and Hally Potter only knew!" Dobby groaned, more tears dropping onto his ragged pillowcase. "If they knew what they mean to us, to the lowly, the enslaved, we dregs of the magical world! Dobby remembers how it was when He-Who-Must-Not-be-named was at the height of his powers, sir! We house-elves were treated like vermin, sir! Of course, Dobby is still treated like that sir," he admitted, drying his face on the pillowcase. "But mostly, sir, life has improved for my kind since you two triumphed over He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Harry and Hally Potter survived, and the Dark Lord's power was broken, and it was a new dawn, sir, and Harry and Hally Potter shone like a beacon of hope for those of us who thought the Dark days would never end, sir...And now, at Hogwarts, terrible things are to happen, are perhaps happening already, and Dobby cannot let Harry and Hally Potter stay here now that history is to repeat itself, now that the Chamber of Secrets is open once more--"

Dobby froze, horrorstruck, then grabbed Harry's water jug from his bedside table and cracked it over his own head, toppling of sight. A second later, he crawled back onto Harry's bed, cross-eyed, muttering, "bad Dobby, very bad Dobby..."

Hally couldn't help but let out a giggle at the house-elf before becoming serious once more, watching her brother question the house-elf.

"So there is a Chamber of Secrets?" Harry whispered. "And--did you say it's been opened before? Tell us Dobby!"

He seized the elf's bony wrist as Dobby's hand inched toward the water jug. "But we're not Muggle-born--how can we be in danger from the Chamber?"

"Ah, sir, ask no more, ask no more of poor Dobby," stammered the elf, his eyes huge in the dark. "Dark deeds are planned in this place, but Harry and Hally Potter must not be here when they happen--go home Harry and Hally Potter, go home. Harry and Hally Potter must not meddle in this, sir, 'tis too dangerous--"

"Who is it, Dobby?" Harry questioned, keeping a firm hold on Dobby's wrist to stop him from hitting himself with the water jug again. "Who's opened it? Who opened it the last time?"

"Dobby can't sir. Dobby can't. Dobby mustn't tell!" Squealed the elf. "Go home Harry and Hally Potter, go home!"

"We're not going anywhere!" Harry said fiercely. "One of our best friends are Muggle-born; she'll be first in line if the Chamber really has been opened--"

"Harry and Hally Potter risks their own lives for their friends!" moaned Dobby in a kind of miserable ecstasy. "So noble! So valiant! But they must save themselves, they must. Harry and Hally Potter must not--"

Dobby suddenly froze, his bat ears quivering. Harry and Hally heard it, too. There were footsteps coming down the passageway outside.

"Dobby must go!" breathed the elf, terrified. There was a loud crack, and Harry's fist was suddenly clenched on thin air. Harry slumped back into his bed, his eyes on the dark doorway to the hospital wing along with Hally's as the footsteps drew nearer.

Next moment, Dumbledore was backing into the dormitory, wearing a long woolly dressing gown and a nightcap. He was carrying one end of what looked like a statue. Professor McGonagall appeared a second later, carrying its feet. Together, they heaved it onto a bed.

"Get Madam Pomfrey," whispered Dumbledore, and Professor McGonagall hurried past the end of Harry and Hally's beds out of sight. The twins layed quiet still, pretending to be asleep. They heard urgent voices, and then Professor McGonagall swept back into view, closely followed by Madam Pomfrey, who was pulling a cardigan on over her nightdress. They heard a sharp intake of breath.

"What happened?" Madam Pomfrey whispered to Dumbledore, bending over the statue on the bed.

"Another attack," said Dumbledore. "Minerva found him on the stairs."

"There was a bunch of grapes next to him," Said Professor McGonagall. "We think he was trying to sneak up here to visit to visit the Potters."

Harry and Hally's stomach gave a horribl lurch. Slowly and carefully, they both raised theiselves a few inches so they could look at the statue on the bed. A ray of moonlight lay across its staring face.

It was Colin Creevey. His eyes were wide and his hands were stuck up in front of him, holding his camera.

"Petrified?" whispered Madam Pomfrey

"Yes," said Professor McGonagall. "But I shudder to think...if Albus hadn't been on the way downstairs for hot chocolate--who knows what might have--"

The three of them stared down at Colin. Then Dumbledore leaned forward and wrenched the camera out of Colin's rigid grip.

"You don't think he managed to get a picture of his attacker?" Professor McGonagall asked eagerly.

Dumbledore didn't answer. He opened the back of the camera.

"Good gracious!" said Madam Pomfrey.

A jet of steam had hissed out of the camera. Harry, and Hally three to four beds away, caught the acrid smell of burnt plastic.

"Melted," Said Madam Pomfrey wonderingly. "all melted..."

"What does this mean, Albus?" Professor McGonagall asked urgently

"It means," said Dumbledore, "That the Chamber of Secrets is indeed open again."

Madam Pomfrey clapped a hand to her mouth. Professor McGonagall stared at Dumbledore.

"But, Albus...surely...who?"

"The question is not who," said Dumbledore, his eyes on Colin. "The question is, how..."

And from what Harry and Hally could see of Professor McGonagall's shadowy face, she didn't understand this any better than they did.

A/N: That is all for chapter 21. See you in chapter 22 bye for now.

Chapter 22 THE DUELING CLUB

Harry and Hally woke up on Sunday morning to find their dormitory blazing with winter sunlight and their arms reboned but very stiff. He sat up quickly and looked over at Colin's bed, but it had been blocked from view by the high curtains Harry and Hally had changed behind yesterday. Seeing that they were awake, Madam Pomfrey came bustling over with two breakfast trays levitating and then began bending and stretching their arms and fingers.

"All in order," she said as they clumsily fed themselves porridge left-handed. "When you two have finished eating, you may leave."

Both twins dressed quickly one at a time within the hospital bathroom and hurried off to Gryffindor Tower, desperate to tell Ron and Hermione about Colin and Dobby, but they both weren't there. The twins left to look for them, wondering where they could have got to and feeling slightly hurt that they weren't interested in whether they had their bones back or not.

As the twins passed the library, Percy Weasley strolled out of it, looking in far better spirits than last time they'd met.

"Oh, hello Harry and Hally," he said. "Excellent flying yesterday, really excellent. Gryffindor has just taken the lead for the House Cup—you both earned twenty-five points each, giving you both fifty points!"

"You haven't seen Ron or Hermione, have you?" the twins asked him simultaneously.

"No I haven't," answered Percy, his smile fading. "I hope Ron's not in another girls' toilet...."

Both twins forced out a laugh, watched Percy walk out of sight, and then headed straight for Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. They couldn't see why Ron and Hermione would be in there again, but after making sure that neither Filch nor any prefects were around, they opened the door and heard their voices coming from a locked stall.

"It's us," they said, closing the door behind them. There was a clunk, a splash, and a gasp from within the stall and they saw Hermione's eye peering through the keyhole.

"Harry! Hally!" she said. "You both gave us such a fright—come in—how's your arms?"

"Fine," said the twins, squeezing into the stall one at a time. An old cauldron was perched on the toilet, and a crackling from under the rim told Harry and Hally that they had lit a fire beneath it. Conjuring up portable, waterproof fires was a specialty of Hermione's.

Hally peered into the cauldron, "I thought that we agreed that I would make this Polyjuice potion," she commented

"Yes...well...Ron and I thought that since you were in the Hospital wing, that I would get it started for you," Hermione explained, not wanting to hurt Hally's feelings.

"Ok...from what I'm seeing so far, you've done an excellent start on it, nothing has exploded yet," Hally looked away grinning

"Hey Hally...." "Gotcha," Hally grinned at the bushy-haired girl

"That was so evil Hally," Hermione giggled before they got serious once more.

"We'd've come to meet you two, but we decided to get started on the Polyjuice potion to keep on schedule," Ron whispered to Harry, who with difficulty, locked the stall again. "We've decided that this is the safest place to hide it as well."

"Now are you sure that you both decided that or was it Hermione, Ron?" Hally questioned

"Both of us did Hally, he's not lying about that," Hermione answered her

“Well, we already know—we heard Professor McGonagall telling Professor Flitwick this morning. That’s why we decided we’d better get going—

“The sooner we get a confession out of Malfoy, the better,” Snarled Ron. “D’you know what I think? He was in such a foul temper after the Quidditch match, he took it out on Colin.”

“There’s something else,” Both Harry and Hally replied, watching Hermione tearing bundles of knotgrass and throwing them into the potion. “Dobby came to visit us in the middle of the night.”

Ron and Hermione looked up, amazed. They told them everything Dobby had told them—or hadn’t told them. Hermione and Ron listened with their mouths open.

“The Chamber of Secrets has been opened before?” Hermione asked in wonder

“That settles it,” said Ron in a triumphant voice. “Lucius Malfoy must’ve opened the Chamber when he was at school here and now he’s told dear old Draco how to do it. It’s obvious. Wish Dobby’d told you two what kind of monster’s in there, though. I want to know how come nobody’s noticed it sneaking around the school.”

“Maybe it can make itself invisible,” said Hermione, prodding leeches to the bottom of the cauldron. “Or maybe it can disguise itself—pretend to be a suit of armor or something—I’ve read about Chameleon Ghouls—

“You read too much, Hermione,” said Ron, pouring dead lacewings on top of the leeches. He crumpled up the empty lacewing bag and looked at the twins.

“So Dobby stopped us from getting on the train and broke your arms...” He shook his head. “You know what you two? If he doesn’t stop trying to save your lives he’s going to kill you two.”

The news that Colin Creevey had been attacked and was now lying as though dead in the hospital wing had spread through the entire

school by Monday morning. The air was suddenly thick with rumor and suspicion. The first years were now moving around the castle in tight-knit groups, as though scared they would be attacked if they ventured forth alone.

Ginny Weasley, who sat next to Colin Creevey in Charms, was distraught, but Harry and Hally felt that Fred and George were going the wrong way about cheering her up. They were taking turns covering themselves with fur or boils and jumping out at her from behind statues. They only stopped when Percy, apoplectic with rage, told them he was going to write to Mrs. Weasley and tell her Ginny was having nightmares.

Meanwhile, hidden from the teachers, a roaring trade in talismans, amulets, and other protective devices was sweeping the school. Neville Longbottom bought a large, evil-smelling green onion, a pointed purple crystal, and a rotting newt tail before the other Gryffindor boys pointed out that he was in no danger; he was a pure-blood, and therefore unlikely to be attacked.

"They went for Filch first," Neville said, his round face fearful. "And everyone knows I'm almost a Squib."

In the second week of December Professor McGonagall came around as usual, collecting names of those who would be staying at school for Christmas. Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione signed her list; they had heard that Malfoy was staying, which struck them as very suspicious. The holidays would be the perfect time to use the Polyjuice Potion and try to worm a confession out of him.

Unfortunately, the potion was only half finished. They still need the bicorn horn and the boomslang skin, and the only place they were going to get them was from the twins' adopted father, Severus Snape's own private stores. Harry and Hally felt that they'd rather face Slytherins' legendary monster than let Severus catch them robbing his office, but had done the deed without any problems by sneaking around their dad's own jinxed alarms, and taking what they only needed before making everything seem to be in place, and untouched that day.

“What we need,” said Hermione briskly as Thursday afternoon’s double Potions lesson loomed nearer, “is a diversion. Then one of us can sneak into Professor Snape’s office and take what we need...”

“Leave that to us Hermione,” Harry and Hally spoke out at once.

Ron looked at the three nervously.

“I think I’d better do the actual stealing,” Hermione shook her head, continuing in a matter-of-fact- tone. “You three will be expelled if you get into any more trouble, and I’ve got a clean record. So all you need to do is cause enough mayhem to keep your dad busy for five minutes or so.”

Both twins smiled feebly after listening to Hermione carefully and realizing that she was right. Deliberately causing mayhem in their father’s Potions class was about as safe as poking a sleeping dragon in the eye, so they both nodded in agreement, plotting out exactly how to do the job.

Potions lessons took place in one of the large dungeons. Thursday afternoon’s lesson proceeded in the usual way. Twenty cauldrons stood steaming between the wooden desks, on which stood brass scales and jars of ingredients. Severus Snape prowled through the fumes, making waspish remarks about the Gryffindor’s work except for Harry and Hally while the Slytherins sniggered appreciatively. Draco Malfoy, who was one of Severus Snape’s favorite student, kept flicking puffer-fish eyes at Ron, Harry and Hally, who knew that if they retaliated at that moment, they would get detention faster than you could say “Unfair”.

Harry glanced to the right of him, seeing Hally give him a slight nod before he deliberately started to foul up his potion. Harry’s Swelling Solution was far too runny, but he had his mind on more important things. He and his sister were waiting for Hermione’s signal, and he deliberately did not listen as Severus paused to sneer at his watery potion in order to keep Harry motivated. When Severus turned and walked off to bully Neville, Hermione caught both Harry and Hally’s eyes and nodded.

Both twins ducked swiftly down behind their cauldrons while Harry pulled one of Fred's Filibuster fireworks out of his pocket, and gave it a quick prod with his wand. The firework began to fizz and sputter. Knowing he had only seconds, Harry straightened up along with his twin sister, took aim, and lobbed it into the air; it landed right on target in Goyle's cauldron.

Goyle's potion exploded, showering the whole class. People shrieked as splashes of the Swelling Solution hit them. Malfoy got a faceful and his nose began to swell like a balloon; Goyle blundered around, his hands over his eyes, which had expanded to the size of a dinner plate—Severus was trying to restore calm and find out what had happened. Through the confusion, the twins saw Hermione slip quietly into Severus Snape's office.

"Silence! SILENCE!" Severus roared. "Anyone who has been splashed, come here for a Deflating Draft—when I find out who did this—

Both twins tried not to laugh as they watched Malfoy hurry forward, his head drooping with the weight of a nose like a small melon. As half the class lumbered up to Severus's desk, some weighted down with arms like clubs, others unable to talk through gigantic puffed-up lips, Harry and Hally saw Hermione slide back into the dungeon, the front of her robes bulging.

When everyone had taken a swig of antidote and the various swellings had subsided, Severus swept over to Goyle's cauldron and scooped out the twisted black remains of the firework. There was a sudden hush.

"If I ever find out who threw this," Severus whispered. "I shall make sure that perosn is expelled."

Harry as well as Hally arranged their face into what they hoped was a puzzled expression to throw their father off of their trail. Severus was looking right at them, and the bell that rang ten minutes later could not have been more welcome.

"He knew that we had something to do with it," they told Ron and Hermione as they hurried back to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. "We could tell."

Hermione gave Hally the new ingredients, watching the raven-red-streak-haired girl throw them into the cauldron and began stirring feverishly.

"It'll be ready in two weeks," Hermione said happily

"Yes, considering that you got them just in time," Hally nodded in agreement

"Professor Snape can't prove that you two has something to do with that," said Ron reassuringly to Harry and Hally. "What can he do?"

"Knowing our dad, something foul or something horrible," both twins commented as the potion frothed and bubbled.

A week later, Harry, Hally, Ron and Hermione were walking across the entrance hall when they saw a small knot of people gathered around the notice board, reading a piece of parchment that had just been pinned up. Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas beckoned them over, looking excited.

"They're starting another Dueling club!" said Seamus. "First meeting tonight! I wouldn't mind more dueling lessons; they might come in handy one of these days..."

"What, you reckon Slytherin's monster can duel?" said Ron, but he too, read the sign with interest.

"Could be useful," he said to Harry, Hally and Hermione as they went to dinner. "Shall we go?"

Harry, Hally and Hermione were all for it, but the twins wanted to get their father's advice on the suggestion, finding him just going inside the Great Hall at that very moment. They stood to the side, telling Severus about the new club while he listened to them until they waited for his opinion.

"I do not see why you both cannot attend this meeting, however, Lockhart will be in charge of this one, and what better way to knock him down a peg or two by walking in there wearing your own dueling attire?" Severus suggested while containing a smirk on his face.

"Thanks dad," Harry and Hally grinned as they started to walk off to have dinner.

"Your welcome, you little devious imps...fouling Mr. Goyle's own potion, simply priceless," Severus muttered after they walked away from him to join their friends.

At eight o'clock that evening they hurried back to the Great Hall meeting up with Ron and Hermione, wearing their dueling clothes. The long dining tables had vanished and a golden stage had appeared along one wall, lit by thousands of candles floating overhead. The ceiling was velvety black once more and most of the school seemed to be packed beneath it, all carrying their wands and looking excited.

Lockhart took one look at the twins coming in with their friends, noticing their attire, and looked over at Severus in bewilderment.

"Severus, your twins have their own dueling clothes?" he enquired

"Yes they do, shocking isn't it? Especially when they are the top two duelists in my dueling club," Severus smirked at the Dark Arts Professor.

"I wonder who'll be teaching us?" said Hermione as they edged into the chattering crowd. "Someone told me Flitwick was a dueling champion when he was young--maybe it'll be him."

Both twins sniggered at that moment. They couldn't spoil the surprise of who it was that was going to teach them.

"As long as it's not you--" Ron began, but he ended on a groan: Gilderoy Lockhart was walking onto the stage, resplendent in robes of

deep plum and accompanied by none other than Severus Snape, wearing his usual black.

Hally leaned slightly in front of her big brother grinning evilly, "Surprise Ron." she sniggered. Harry sniggered along with her.

Lockhart waved an arm for silence and called, "Gather round, gather round! Can everyone see me? Can you all hear me? Excellent!

"Now, Professor Dumbledore has granted me permission to start this other little dueling club, to train you all in case you ever need to defend yourselves as I myself have done on countless occasions--for full details, see my published works.

"Let me introduce my assistant, Professor Snape," said Lockhart, flashing a wide smile. "He tells me he knows a tiny little bit about dueling himself and has sportingly agreed to help me with a short demonstration before we begin. Now, I don't want any of you youngsters to worry--you'll still have your Potions master when I'm through with him, never fear!"

"Wouldn't it be good if they finished each other off...sorry," Ron squeaked after seeing the glares coming from the twins.

"If anyone is going to get finished off, it'll be Lockhart! Our dad is an excellent duelist...I want to see this up front!" Hally grinned evilly

"I'm with you Hal. Let's move up further," Harry grinned evilly as well as all four of them edged their way to the front sidelines for a better view.

Severus glanced down, noticing Harry and Hally grinning up at him. He gave them both a quick unnoticable wink before turning back to Lockhart, curling his upper lip. Harry and Hally both wondered why Lockhart was still smiling. If their dad had been looking at them like that they'd have been running as fast as they could in the opposite direction. They had seen enough to know what their own father was capable of.

Lockhart and Severus turned to face each other and bowed; at least Lockhart did, with much twirling of his hands, whereas Severus jerked his head irritably. Then they raised their wands like swords in front of them.

"Oh, dad is going to knock his ego down a bit," Hally giggled quietly

"I can see that Hal. This is going to be fun," Harry whispered grinning from ear to ear.

"As you see, we are holding our wands in the accepted combative position," Lockhart told the silent crowd. "On the count of three, we will cast our first spells. Neither of us will be aiming to kill, of course."

"I wouldn't bet on that," Harry and Hally murmured excitedly, watching Severus baring his teeth.

"One--two--three--"

Both of them swung their wands above their heads and pointed them at their opponent; Severus cried "Expelliarmus!" There was a dazzling flash of scarlet light and Lockhart was blasted off his feet: He flew backward off the stage, smashed into the wall, and slid down it to sprawl on the floor.

Harry and Hally both cackled out in hysterical laughter along with Ron, and many of their Gryffindor friends, while Malfoy and some of the other Slytherins cheered. Hermione was dancing on tiptoes. "Do you think he's all right?" she squealed through her fingers.

"Who cares?" Harry, Hally and Ron said together, still cackling.

Lockhart was getting unsteadily to his feet. His hat had fallen off and his wavy hair was standing on end.

"Well, there you have it!" he said, tottering back onto the platform. "That was a Disarming Charm--as you see, I've lost my wand--ah, thank you Miss Brown--yes, and excellent idea to show them that, Professor Snape, but if you don't mind my saying so, it was very obvious what you were about to do. If I had wanted to stop you it

would have been only too easy--however, I felt it would be instructive to let them see..."

"Why you fraudulent jerk," the twins muttered quietly in anger

Severus was looking murderous. Possibly Lockhart had noticed, because he said, "Enough demonstrating! I'm going to come amongst you now and put you all into pairs. Professor Snape, if you'd like to help me--"

They moved through the crowd, matching up partners. Lockhart teamed Neville with Justin Finch-Fletchley, but Severus reached Harry, Hally, and Ron.

He looked down at the three before rendering his decision. "You two; show Lockhart what you both can do, it's time to split up the dream team I believe," He stated just as Lockhart came over to them.

"Mr. Weasley you can partner with Mr. Finnigan. Mr. Potter..."

"Severus, if your twins are advanced, perhaps they can demonstrate to us instead?" Lockhart suggested after taking the time to collect himself.

Severus raised one of his eyebrows up, smirking secretly, "You practically read my mind Lockhart," he simply said before turning back to the twins.

"To the platform you two...not you Mr. Weasley," Severus stated grasping a firm hold on Ron's shoulder.

"Oh come now Severus, having the two against each other? That would be unfair don't you think? I mean Hally is a girl..."

"I don't think so, but if you prefer to see the difference then perhaps Mr. Malfoy would be up first before Miss Potter gets the chance? Mr. Malfoy on the platform." Severus ordered

The students suddenly gathered around the two professors, listening intently.

"Very good choice, but Miss Potter..."

"Is the second top duelist in my dueling club and has a devious mind like her brother. She would put...let us say Mr. Weasley home in a matchbox, so her dueling with another girl who is at a level below her would not be a fair advantage..."

"Could we make this a challenge for the number one title Professor Snape while we're at it?" Draco Malfoy enquired suddenly

Severus looked down at Malfoy slightly, "If you believe you are ready, then fine...Connor you have a challenge against Mr. Malfoy for your title," Severus announced to Harry.

Murmurs and whispers emerged from the students.

"Really, Malfoy? This won't take long," Harry grinned, accepting the challenge.

"Good, then after I defeat you Potter, then I can challenge the second top duelist next, taking both titles," Draco sneered out through the silent hall

"We'll see Malfoy." Harry seethed while Hally covered her hand, yawning in boredom over Draco's announcement.

The three went up onto the platform with Severus and Lockhart each taking an opposite side. Hally stood on the sidelines with Severus while Harry stood not far from Lockhart, raking his gaze over Draco's movements, finding several flaws and started grinning evilly. Draco stood several feet from where Severus and Hally stood, getting ready for the duel.

Malfoy started to strut to the center of the platform, smirking, while Harry headed to the center facing him with a most serious expression on his face.

"Face your opponent!" Lockhart called out, standing at a distance on the platform, "And bow!"

Harry and Draco barely inclined their heads, not taking their eyes off each other.

"Wands at the ready!" shouted Lockhart. "When I count to three, cast your charms to disarm your opponents--only to disarm them--we don't want any accidents..."

"Speak for yourself!" Hally commented

"Raven," Severus warned her quietly

"One...two...three--"

Malfoy raised his wand high, but Harry merely crossed his arms, waiting for the attack, Malfoy threw out his spell while Harry moved out of the way with a swiftness, and stood back into place. Lockhart could only watch in amazement. Malfoy went for another attack once more, throwing another charm Harry's way, but Harry quickly dodge it, without breaking a sweat from his brow. Several students started sniggering over the scene.

"Is that all you have Malfoy? I've seen Neville throw out charms better than you," Harry yawned, already bored with the platinum-blonde boy.

Draco threw out several more charms at Harry until Harry had enough throwing only one charm out "Rictusempra!"

A jet of silver light hit Malfoy in the stomach and he doubled up, wheezing.

"I said disarm only!" Lockhart shouted in alarm over the whispering of the gathering crowd as Malfoy sank to his knees; Harry had hit him with a tickling charm, and he could barely move for laughing. Harry decided to hang back, feeling it would be unsporting to bewitch Malfoy while he was on the floor, but thought better of it when he seen Malfoy point his wand at him trying once more, choking out the word "Tarantallegra!" and within a second Harry moved out of the way as it hit Lockhart instead. He turned to see the Dark Arts professors feet jerk around out of his control in a kind of quickstep.

Laughter erupted from the students at that moment.

"Stop! Stop!" Screamed Lockhart, but Severus suddenly took charge.

"Finite Incantatem!" He shouted; Lockhart's feet stopped dancing, Malfoy stopped laughing, and was able to look up.

A haze of green smoke was hovering over the scene. The students watched the two demonstrators look at each other.

"I believe that I still hold my title Malfoy. Nice try though," Harry grinned evilly

"We're not done Potter..."

"I'm afraid that you are Mr. Malfoy. It is Miss Potters turn to duel against her brother, now step aside," Severus spoke out as Hally started to head to the center of the platform next.

"Better luck next time Malfoy," Hally commented politely until she head him utter a word under his breath at her for noone else to hear, however, Harry heard it clearly.

"What did you call my sister Malfoy!" Harry demanded suddenly while Hally was about to intervene

"I didn't say anything to your sister Potter..., " (GULP!)

"The others may not have heard you, but I did Malfoy. Now apologize to her. You had no right to call her that when she was only being polite to you," Harry seethed

"Harry I can hold my own..."

"I know that Hal, but I'm going to step in anyway, so shush. Well Malfoy, its either apologize or suffer one of our own charms," Harry warned

Draco's face went paler than usual, he turned to look at Professor Snape, "Professor? Are you going to let him threaten me like that sir?" He asked innocently

Severus looked down at him, feigning ignorance. "I don't know what you are talking about Mr. Malfoy, the only thing I heard was you calling my daughter a very nasty name," Severus announced stiffly

Draco gulped once more. "Well Malfoy?" Harry questioned stiffly

"I'm sorry Potter," Draco mumbled in low key

"What was that Malfoy? We didn't quite hear you?" Harry pressed

"I said I'm sorry for calling you that name Potter!" Draco spoke up, fear in his voice.

Harry lowered his wand, letting Draco step aside while Hally contained a grin on her face, stepping up next.

They stood facing each other, getting ready when Severus intervened.

"You two know what to do before you begin, put up your shield," Severus ordered

Lockhart started to interrupt, "Severus, now this is too much. A shield? For what?" he enquired chuckling as thought Severus was making a joke.

"To protect the other students from their dueling each other," Severus stated in a serious manner

Both twins raised their wands starting from where they stood "Sheiletos" they called out as everyone seen a pale yellow light come from their wands surrounding them.

They stood to face each other once more, "Just a moment," Severus informed them throwing a charm out at the two and watching it ricochtet off their sheild.

"Oh come on dad, it's up," The twins groaned at him

"Stop groaning it is not your styles. As you were," Severus told them letting them both continue.

They both took their positions while everyone suddenly got closer with eagerness, wanting to see what they can do. Lockhart simply smiled widely, shaking his head until he seen the twins begin to duel, dodging, blocking, ducking, doing somersaults, keeping from getting hit by each other's charms. Lockhart looked over at Severus, seeing the Potions master keep his eyes on the twins, focusing on their swift movements when they suddenly looked like two blurs right in front of everyone.

"Bloody Brilliant," Ron grinned, his head moving around as though he was looking at a fly buzzing in front of his head.

"Ridiculous," Draco muttered, rolling his eyes at the scene.

"Limdvex!" "STOP!" Severus shouted out to the twins, making them stop their duel

"Severus..." "Which one of you two threw out that charm?" Severus questioned the twins, seeing them look at him innocently

Lockhart walked around the twins and their sheild, standing beside Severus.

"Wh-what is that charms exactly?" He asked

"One of their own! Which one yelled out that charm!" Severus demanded at the twins

Hally stepped forward while Harry looked away grinning. "I did dad," Hally answered him, swaying her body gently.

"I thought so, enough of you two demonstrating," Severus told them, and then looked at Lockhart. "Pair up the rest of the students, so they can try their own skills."

Draco, who was fuming over the twins for keeping their titles, had other plans. He pointed his wand toward them, just as they ended their shield. "Serpensortia!"

The end of his wand exploded. The twins watched as a long black snake shot out of it, and fell heavily onto the floor right in front of them. It raised itself, ready to strike at anything. There were screams as the crowd backed swiftly away from the platform. Harry and Hally both walked back and forth at a safe distance as the snake hissed in anger.

"Now that had to be the most stupidest thing I have ever seen," Hally commented

"The worst thing you can do is bring a snake here when its asleep, and wake it up like that," Harry stated, giving Draco a quick glance, while Severus remained calm.

"Don't move you two," he said lazily, clearly amused that his twins were not afraid of the angry snake. "I'll get rid of it..."

"Allow me!" shouted Lockhart. He brandished his wand at the snake and there was a loud bang; the snake, instead of vanishing, flew ten feet the air and fell back to the floor with a loud smack. Enraged, hissing furiously, it slithered straight toward the only one that didn't back away from the platform...Justin Flinch-Fletchley, and raised itself again, fangs exposed, poised to strike.

"Now he done it dad, it's pissed off and wants revenge," the twins whispered to Severus after moving away from Lockhart quickly

Severus looked down at the twins, "You two can understand it?" he questioned

They only nodded at him, confirming his question. They wasn't sure what made them do it. They wasn't even aware of deciding to do it. All they knew was that their legs were carrying them forward as though they was on casters and that they had shouted stupidly at the snake, "Leave him alone!" And miraculously--inexplicably--the snake slumped to the floor, docile as a thick, black garden hose, its eyes on Harry and Hally. Harry and Hally felt the fear drain out of them. They

knew the snake wouldn't attack anyone now, though how they knew it, they couldn't have explained.

They both looked up at Justin, grinning, expecting to see Justin looking relieved or puzzled, or even grateful--but certainly not angry and scared.

"What do you two think you're playing at?" he shouted, and before Harry and Hally could say anything, Justin had turned and stormed out of the hall.

Severus stepped forward, waved his wand, but thought the better of it when he noticed the twins turning Lockhart's way, "Want a chew toy, go get the pretty looking blonde man there," they quietly told the snake.

Severus moved away as he and the rest of the students watched the big black snake go after Lockhart. The students started laughing as they seen Lockhart yell out in fear, and being chased by the huge snake until Severus made the snake vanish in a small puff of black smoke. He looked down at the twins in an unexpected way: It was a shrewd and calculating look, and the twins didn't like it. They was also dimly aware of an ominous muttering all around the walls within that second. They they felt tugging on the back of their robes.

"Come on you two," Said Ron's voice in their ears. "Move--come on--"

Ron steered tem out of the hall, Hermione hurrying alongside them. As they went through the doors, the people on either side drew away as though they were frightened of catching something. The twins didn't have a clue what was going on, and neither Ron nor Hermione explained anything until they had dragged them all the way up to the empty Gryffindor common room. Then Ron pushed the twins onto a sofa and said, "You're parselmouths. Why didn't you two tell us?"

"We're a what?" Harry and Hally asked him in confusion.

"A Parselmouth!" said Ron. "You two can talk to snakes!"

"I know," Harry commented. "I mean, that's only the second time I've ever done it. I accidentally set a boa constrictor on our cousin Dudley at the zoo once--long story--but it was telling me it had never seen Brazil and I sort of set it free without meaning to--that was before I knew I was a wizard--"

Hally shook her forefinger, "Hey! Was that you? I seen that boa when dad took me there last year! It went right past us saying "Brazil here I come!" Hally spoke out, remembering that very day.

Harry looked at her grinning, "We could have met then..."

"Hey! You two, let's not go down memory lane here! We're talking about what happened moments ago," Ron reminded them both, getting their attention.

"Sorry Ron," Harry replied "yeah, continue what you were saying," Hally commented with a sigh.

Ron looked at Harry, "A boa constrictor told you it never seen Brazil?" Ron repeated faintly, then looked at Hally next. "And you heard it say "Brazil here I come that same day?"

"So?" said Harry. "I bet loads of people here can do it."

Hally shook her head at Harry's comment. "I don't think so Harry, because when I told dad about it, he looked like he was about to go beserk over it, and took me here, making me wait while he was yelling at Professor Dumbledore. He wasn't very happy." Hally explained in detail

"Oh, no they can't," Ron verified. "It's not a common gift, Harry, this is bad."

Hally looked up at him as though he was mad while Harry shook his head, "What's bad?" Harry asked, starting to feel quite angry along with his sister. "What's wrong with everyone? Listen, If we hadn't told that snake not to attack Justin--"

"Oh, that's what you two said to it?"

"What d'you mean? You both were there--you heard us--"

"I heard you two speaking Parseltongue," said Ron. "Snake language. You two could have been saying anything--no wonder Justin panicked, you two sounded like you both were egging the snake on or something--it was creepy, you know--"

Harry and Hally gaped at him.

"We spoke a different language? But--I don't think we realized--how can we speak a language without knowing we can speak it?"

Ron shook his head. Both he and Hermione were looking as though someone had died. Harry and Hally both couldn't see what was so terrible.

"D'you want to tell us what's wrong with stopping a massive snake from biting off Justin's head?" They both said. "What does it matter how we did it as long as Justin doesn't have to join the Headless Hunt?"

"It matters," said Hermione, speaking at last in a hushed voice, "Because being able to talk to snakes was what Salazar Slytherin was famous for. That's why the symbol of Slytherin House is a serpent."

Harry's mouth dropped open while Hally smacked her forehead, kicking herself over the history of Salazar Slytherin.

"Exactly," said Ron. "And now the whole school's going to think you two are his great-great-great-grandson and granddaughter or something--"

"But we're not!" The twins cried out at once, with a panic they couldn't quite explain.

"You'll both find that hard to prove," said Hermione. "He lived about a thousand years ago; for all we know, you two could be."

The twins laid awake inside their dorms for hours that night. Hally looked up at the top of her four poster bed while inside Harry's dorm, through the gap in the curtains around his four-poster bed he watched snow starting to drift past the tower window and wondered at the same time as Hally did inside her dorm...

Could they both be a descendant of Salazar Slytherin? They didn't know anything about their real father's side of the family after all.

Quietly, Harry tried to say something in Parseltongue. The words wouldn't come. It seemed he had to be face-to-face with a snake to do it. Hally tried the same thing inside her dorm...nothing came out. Hally sighed in irritation.

"But we're in Gryffindor, Harry thought. The sorting hat wouldn't have put us in there if I had Slytherin blood...

"Ah," said a nasty little voice inside his brain, but the sorting Hat wanted to put you in Slytherin, don't you remember?

Harry turned over. He and Hally would see Justin the next day in Herbology and they would explain that they'd been calling the snake off, not egging it on, which (he thought angrily, pummeling his pillow) any fool should have realized.

Hally turned over in her bed, having the similar thoughts as her brother. Hally nearly ripped her pillow in anger before finally letting herself fall asleep.

By next morning, however, the snow that had begun in the night had turned into a blizzard so thick that the last Herbology lesson of the term was canceled; Professor Sprout wanted to fit socks and scarves on the Mandrakes, a tricky operation she would entrust to no one else, now that it was so important for the Mandrakes to grow quickly and revive Mrs. Norris and Colin Creevey.

Harry and Hally fretted about this next to the fire in the Gryffindor common room, while Ron and Hermione used their time off to play a game of wizard chess.

"For heaven's sake Harry and Hally," said Hermione, exasperated, as one of Ron's bishops wrestled her knight off his horse and dragged him off the board. "Go and find Justin if it's so important to you two."

So both twins got up and left through the portrait hole, wondering where Justin might be.

The castle was darker than it usually was in daytime because of the thick, swirling gray snow at every window. Shivering, the twins walked past classrooms where lessons were taking place, catching snatches of what was happening within. Professor McGonagall was shouting at someone who, by the sound of it, had turned his friend into a badger. Resisting the urge to take a look, Harry and Hally walked on by, thinking that Justin might be using his free time to catch up on some work, and had decided to check the library first.

A group of the Hufflepuffs who should have been in Herbology were indeed sitting at the back of the library, but they didn't seem to be working. Between the long lines of high bookshelves, the twins could see that their heads were close together and they were having what looked like an absorbing conversation. They couldn't see whether Justin was among them. They were walking toward them when something of what they were saying met their ears. and they both paused to listen, hidden in the Invisibility section.

"So anyway," a stout boy was saying, "I told Justin to hide up in our dormitory, I mean to say, if the Potter's marked him down as their next victim, it's best if he keeps a low profile for a while. Of course, Justin's been waiting for something like this to happen ever since he let slip to the Potter's that he was Muggle-born. Justin actually told them he'd been down for Eton. That's not the kind of thing you bandy about with Slytherin's two heirs on the loose, is it?"

"You definitely think it is the Potter's then, Ernie?" said a girl with blonde pigtails anxiously.

"Hannah," said the stout boy solemnly, "They're Parselmouths. Everyone knows that's the mark of a Dark wizard or witch. Have you

ever heard of a decent one who could talk to snakes? They called Slytherin himself Serpent-tongue."

There was some heavy murmuring at this, and Ernie went on, "Remember what was written on the wall? Enemies of the heir, Beware. The Potter's had some sort of run-in with Filch. Next thing we know, Filch's cat's attacked. That first year, Creevey, was annoying the Potters at the Quidditch match, taking pictures of them while they was lying in the mud. Next thing we know--Creevey's been attacked."

"They always seem so nice though," said Hannah uncertainly, "and well, they're the ones who made You-Know-Who disappear. They can't be all bad, can they?"

Ernie lowered his voice mysteriously, the Hufflepuffs bent closer, and Harry and Hally both edged nearer so that they could catch Ernie's words.

"No one knows how they survived that attack by You-Know-Who. I mean to say, they was only babies when it happened. They should have been blasted into smithereens. Only a really powerful Dark wizard or witch could have survived a curse like that." He dropped his voice until it was barely a whisper, and said, "That's probably why You-Know-Who wanted to kill them in the first place. Didn't want another Dark Lord or witch competing with him. I wonder what other powers the Potter's have been hiding?"

Harry nor Hally couldn't take anymore. Harry clearing his throat loudly, stepped out from behind the bookshelves along with Hally. If they hadn't been feeling so angry, they would have found the sight that greeted them funny: Every one of the Hufflepuffs looked as though they had been Petrified by the sight of him, and the color was draining out of Ernie's face.

"Hello," said Harry, taking charge of the situation while Hally gave Ernie death glares. "We're looking for Justin Finch-Fletchley."

The Hufflepuffs' worst fears had clearly been confirmed. They all looked fearfully at Ernie.

"What do you two want with him?" Ernie asked in a quavering voice.

"We wanted to tell him what really happened with that snake at the Dueling Club," Harry answered.

Ernie bit his white lips and then, taking a deep breath, said, "We were all here. We saw what happened."

"Then you would have noticed that after we spoke to it, the snake backed off?" Said Harry

"All I saw," said Ernie stubbornly, though he was trembling as he spoke, "was you two speaking Parseltongue and chasing the snake toward Justin."

"We didn't chase it at him!" Harry said, his voice shaking with anger. "It didn't even touch him!"

"It was a very near miss," said Ernie. "And in case you two are getting ideas," He added as Hally anger started to get high on the rictor scale hastily, "I might tell you two that you can trace my family back through nine generations of witches and warlocks and my blood's as pure as anyone's so--"

"Meaning ignorance must run in your family as well as Malfoy's," Hally spat out

"I don't care what sort of blood you've got!" Harry said fiercely "And why would we want to attack Muggle-borns?"

"I've heard you hate those Muggles you used to live with," said Ernie swiftly

"It's not possible to live with the Dursley's and not hate them," said Harry. "I'd like to see you try it."

He went to turn on his heel to storm out when Hally stopped him briefly by getting very close to Ernie. "By the way...Ernie? Next time?"

you better think first before putting your foot in your mouth," Hally glared

"Why? What could you do to me?" Ernie laughed nervously

"We could do this!" The twins exclaimed swinging a fist each

"Wham! Wham!" "Next time it will be worse," They simply said storming out of the library, earning themselves a reproving glare from Madam Pince, who was polishing the gilded cover of a large spellbook.

The twins blundered up the corridor, barely noticing where they was going. They was in such a fury. The result was that they walked into something very large and solid, which knocked them backward onto the floor.

"Oh, hello Hagrid," Harry and Hally said looking up.

Hagrid's face was entirely hidden by a woolly, snow-covered balaclava, but it couldn't possibly be anyone else, as he filled most of the corridor in his moleskin overcoat. A dead rooster was hanging from one of his massive, gloved hands.

"All righ', Harry, Hally?" he said, pulling up the balaclava so he could speak. "Why aren't yeh's n class?"

"Canceled," the twins said, getting up. "What're you doing in here?"

Hagrid held up the dead rooster.

"Second one killed this term," he explained. "It's either foxes or a Blood-Suckin' Bugbear, an' I need the Headmaster's permission ter put a charm around the hen coop."

He peered more closely at Harry and Hally from under his thick, snow-flecked eyebrows.

"Yeh two sure yeh's all righ'? Yeh's look all hot an' bothered--"

The twins couldn't bring themselves to repeat what Ernie and the rest of the Hufflepuffs had been saying about them.

"It's nothing," Hally said

"We'd better get going Hagrid, It's Transfiguration next and we've got to pick up our books."

They walked off, their minds still full of what Ernie had said about them.

"Justin's been waiting for something like this to happen ever since he let slip to the Potters that he was Muggle-born..."

Harry and Hally stamped up the stairs and turned along another corridor, which was particularly dark; the torches had been extinguished by a strong, icy draft that was blowing through a loose windowpane. They were walking halfway down the passage when they tripped headlong over something lying on the floor.

They turned to squint at what they had fallen over and felt as though their stomachs had dissolved.

Justin Finch-Fletchley was lying on the floor, rigid and cold, a look of shock frozen on his face, his eyes staring blankly at the ceiling. And that wasn't all. Next to him was another figure, the strangest sight Harry and Hally both had ever seen.

It was Nearly Headless Nick, no longer pearly-white and transparent, but black and smoky, floating immobile and horizontal, six inches off the floor. His head was half off and his face wore an expression of shock identical to Justin's.

The twins got to their feet, their breathing fast and shallow, their hearts doing a kind of drumroll against their ribs. They looked wildly up and down the deserted corridor and saw a line of spiders scuttling as fast as they could away from the bodies. The only sounds were the muffled voices of teachers from the classes on either side.

They could run, and no one would ever know they had been there. But they couldn't just leave them lying here...They had to get help...Would anyone believe they hadn't had anything to do with this?

As they stood, panicking, a door right next to them opened with a bang. Peeves the Poltergeist came shooting out.

"Why it's potty wee Potter and my Raven!" cackled Peeves, knocking Harry around playfully as he bounded past him. "What's Potter up to? Why's Potter and my Raven lurking--"

Peeves stopped, halfway through a midair somersault. Upside down, he spotted Justin and Nearly Headless Nick. He flipped the right way up, filled his lungs and, before either Harry and Hally could stop him, screamed, "ATTACK! ATTACK! ANOTHER ATTACK! NO MORTAL OR GHOST IS SAFE! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES! ATTAAAACK!"

Crash--crash--crash--door after door flew open along the corridor and people flooded out. For several long minutes, there was a scene of such confusion that Justin was in danger of being squashed and people kept standing in Nearly Headless Nick. Harry and Hally found themselves pinned against the wall as the teachers shouted for quiet. Professor McGonagall came running, followed by her own class, one of whom still had black-and-white-striped hair. She used her wand to set off a loud bang, which restored silence, and ordered everyone back into their classes. No sooner had the scene cleared somewhat than Ernie the Hufflepuff arrived, panting, on the scene.

"Caught in the act!" Ernie yelled, his face stark white, pointing his finger dramatically at Harry and Hally.

"That will do MacMillan!" said Professor McGonagall sharply.

Peeves was bobbing overhead, now grinning wickedly, surveying the scene; Peeves always loved chaos. As the teachers bent over Justin and Nearly Headless Nick, examining them, Peeves broke into song;

"Oh, Potters, you rotters, oh, what have you done. You're killing off students, you think it's good fun--"

"Peeves!" Hally cried out with wide eyes

"That's enough Peeves!" barked Professor McGonagall, and Peeves zoomed away backward, with his tongue out at the twins...Harry more than Hally that is.

Justin was carried up to the hospital wing by Professor Flitwick and Professor Sinistra of the Astronomy department, but nobody seemed to know what to do for Nearly Headless Nick. In the end, Professor McGonagall conjured a large fan out of thin air, which she gave to Ernie with instructions to waft Nearly Headless Nick up the stairs. This Ernie did, fanning Nick along like a silent black hovercraft. This left Harry, Hally, and Professor McGonagall alone together.

"This way Potters," she said

"Professor," the twins said at once, "We swear we didn't--"

"This is out of my hands, Potters," said Professor McGonagall curtly.

They marched in silence around a corner and she stopped before a large and extremely ugly stone gargoye.

"Lemon drop!" she said. This was evidently a password, because the gargoye sprang suddenly to life and hopped aside as the wall behind them split in two. Even full of dread for what was coming, Harry and Hally couldn't fail to be amazed. Behind the wall was a spiral staircase that was moving smoothly upward, like an escalator. As they and Professor McGonagall stepped onto it, Harry and Hally heard the wall thud closed behind them. They rose upward in circles, higher and higher, until at last, slightly dizzy, the twins saw a gleaming oak door ahead, with a brass knocker in the shape of a griffin.

They knew now where they was being taken. To Harry's surprise this must be where Dumbledore lived.

A/N: That is all for Chapter 22. see you in chapter 23 bye for now.

Chapter 23 THE POLYJUICE POTION

They stepped off the stone staircase at the top, and Professor McGonagall rapped on the door. It opened silently and they entered. Professor McGonagall told both Harry and Hally to wait and left them there, alone.

Harry looked around with his twin sister Hally. One thing was certain: of all the teachers' offices, including their father's the twins had visited so far this year, Dumbledore's was by far the most interesting. If they hadn't been scared out of their wits that they were about to be thrown out of school, they would have been very pleased to have a chance to look around it.

It was a large and beautiful circular room, full of funny little noises. A number of curious silver instruments stood on spindle-legged tables, whirring and emitting little puffs of smoke. The walls were covered with portraits of old headmasters and headmistresses, all of whom were snoozing gently in their frames. There was also an enormous, claw-footed desk, and, sitting on a shelf behind it, a shabby, tattered wizard's hat—the Sorting Hat.

Both twins hesitated. They each cast a wary eye around the sleeping witches and wizards on the walls. Surely it couldn't hurt if they took the hat down and tried it on again? Just to see...just to make sure it had put them in the right house—

One at a time, they walked quietly around the desk with Harry lifting the hat from its shelf, and lowered it slowly onto his head first. It was much too large and slipped down over his eyes, just as it had done to both twins the last time they had put it on. Harry stared at the black inside of the hat, waiting. Then a small voice said in his ear, but was also heard by his twin sister, "Bee in your bonnet, Harry Potter? Or should I say Hally Potter as well?"

Harry raised the hat up slightly, noticing the look of shock upon his little sister's face. "Er, yes," Harry muttered at last. "Er—sorry to bother you—we wanted to ask—

“You both have been wondering whether I put you in the right House,” said the hat smartly. “Yes...you Harry Potter were particularly difficult to place, which was why your sister went along with you. But I stand by what I said before”—Harry and Hally’s heart leapt at the same time—“You would have done well in Slytherin—

Hally let out a groan, “Harry James...”

Harry’s stomach plummeted. He grabbed the point of the hat and pulled it off. It hung limply in his hand, grubby and faded. Harry pushed it back onto its shelf, feeling sick.

“You’re wrong,” he said aloud to the still and silent hat. It didn’t move. Both twins backed away, watching it. Then a strange, gagging noise behind them made them both wheel around.

They wasn’t alone after all. Standing on a golden perch behind the door was a decrepit-looking bird that resembled a half-plucked turkey. Harry stared at it and the bird looked balefully back, making its gagging noise again. Harry thought it looked very ill. Its eyes were dull and, even as Harry watched, a couple more feathers fell out of its tail. Hally got closer to the bird with a grin.

“Hello Fawkes,” Hally greeted quietly

Harry gave her a sly look, “You know this bird Hal?” He enquired

“Yeah Harry, but he doesn’t look well like he usually do,” Hally answered

Harry was thinking that all they needed was for Dumbledore’s pet bird to die while they was alone with it, when the bird burst into flames, making Hally squeak out in surprise.

Harry yelled in shock and backed away into the desk taking Hally with him. They both suddenly looked feverishly around in case there was a glass of water somewhere but couldn’t see one; the bird, meanwhile, had become a fireball; it gave one loud shriek and next second there was nothing but a smouldering pile of ash on the floor.

The office door opened. Dumbledore came in, looking very somber.

“Professor,” Harry gasped out. “Your bird—we couldn’t do anything—he just caught fire—

To the twin’s astonishment, Dumbledore smiled.

“About time, too,” he said. “He’s been looking dreadful for days; I’ve been telling him to get a move on.”

He chuckled at the stunned look on Harry and Hally’s faces.

“Fawkes is a phoenix Harry, which Hally already knew of course, but did not know that Phoenixes burst into flames when it is time for them to die and are reborn from the ashes. Watch him...”

The twins looked down in time to see a tiny, wrinkled, newborn bird poke its head out of the ashes. It was quite as ugly as the old one.

“It’s a shame that you two had to see him on a Burning Day,” said Dumbledore, seating himself behind his desk. “He’s really very handsome most of the time, wonderful red and gold plumage. Fascinating creature, phoenixes. They can carry immensely heavy loads, their tears have healing powers, and they make highly faithful pets.”

In the shock of Fawkes catching fire, Harry and Hally had forgotten what they were there for, but it all came back to them as Dumbledore settled himself in the high chair behind the desk and fixed the twins with his penetrating, light-blue stare.

Before Dumbledore could speak another word, however, the door of the office flew open with an almighty bang and Hagrid burst in, a wild look in his eyes, his balaclava perched on top of his shaggy black head and the dead rooster still swinging from his hand.

“It wasn’t Harry and Hally, Professor Dumbledore!” said Hagrid urgently. “I was talking ter them seconds before that kid was found. They never had time sir—

Dumbledore tried to say something, but Hagrid went ranting on, waving the rooster around in his agitation, sending feathers everywhere.

“—it can’t’ve bin them. I’ll swear it in front o’ the Ministry o’ Magic if I have to—

“Hagrid, I—

“—yeh’ve got the wrong boy and girl, sir, I know Harry and Hally never—

“Hagrid!” said Dumbledore loudly. “I do not think that Harry nor Hally attacked those people.”

“Oh,” said Hagrid, the rooster falling limply at his side. “Right. I’ll wait outside then, Headmaster.”

And he stomped out looking embarrassed.

“You don’t think it was us, Professor?” Harry repeated hopefully as Dumbledore brushed rooster feathers off his desk.

“No, Harry I don’t,” said Dumbledore, though his face was somber again. “But I still want to talk to you both.”

Harry and Hally waited nervously while Dumbledore considered them, the tips of his long fingers together.

“I must ask you both, Harry, Hally, whether there is anything you two like to tell me,” he said gently. “Anything at all.”

Hally shifted her feet quietly while Harry didn’t know what to say. He thought of Malfoy shouting, “You’ll be next, Mudbloods!” and of the Polyjuice Potion simmering away in Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. Then he thought of the disembodied voice he had heard twice and remembered what Ron had said to them: “Hearing voices no else can hear isn’t a good sign, even in the Wizarding world.” He thought, too, about what everyone was saying about him, and his growing dread

that he and his sister was somehow connected with Salazar Slytherin....

“No,” said Harry and Hally finally. “There isn’t anything, Professor....”

The double attack on Justin and Nearly Headless Nick turned what had hitherto been nervousness into real panic. Curiously, it was Nearly Headless Nick’s fate that seemed to worry people most. What could possibly do that to a ghost? People asked each other; what terrible power could harm someone who was already dead? There was almost a stampede to book seats on the Hogwarts Express so that students could go home for Christmas.

“At this rate, we’ll be the only ones left,” Ron told Harry, Hally, and Hermione. “Us, Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle. What a jolly holiday it’s going to be.”

“No, Blaise told me just the other day that she was staying behind. Her parents are going to away with Malfoy’s parents this year, invited them to go along from what she explained.” Hally spoke out

Crabbe and Goyle, who always did whatever Malfoy did, had signed up to stay over the holidays, too. But Harry and Hally was glad that most people were leaving. They was tired of people skirting around them in the corridors, as though they was about to sprout fangs or spit poison; tired of all the muttering, pointing, and hissing as they passed.

Fred and George, however, found all this very funny. They went out of their way to march ahead of Harry and Hally down the corridors, shouting, “Make way for the Heirs of Slytherin, seriously evil wizard and witch coming through....”

Percy was deeply disapproving of this behavior.

“It is not a laughing matter,” he said coldly.

“Oh, get out of the way Percy.” Said Fred. “Harry and Hally’s in a hurry.”

"Yeah, they're off to the Chamber of Secrets for a cup of tea with their fanged servant," said George, chortling.

Ginny didn't find it amusing either.

"Oh, don't," she wailed every time Fred asked Harry and Hally loudly who they were planning to attack next, or when George pretended to ward Harry and Hally off with a large clove of garlic when they met.

The twins didn't mind; it made them feel better that Fred and George at least thought the idea of them being Slytherin's heirs was quite ludicrous. But their antics seemed to be aggravating Draco Malfoy; who looked increasingly sour each time he saw them at it.

"It's because he's bursting to say it's really him," said Ron knowingly. "You know how he hates anyone beating him at anything, and you two are getting all the credit for his dirty work."

"Not for long," said Hermione in a satisfied tone. "The Polyjuice Potion's nearly ready from what Hally told me and Harry. We'll be getting the truth out of him any day now."

At last the term ended, and a silence deep as the snow on the grounds descended on the castle. Harry and Hally both found it peaceful, rather than gloomy, and enjoyed the fact that they, Hermione, and the Weasleys had the run of Gryffindor Tower, which meant they could play exploding snap loudly without bothering anyone, and practice dueling in private. Fred, George, and Ginny had chosen to stay at school rather than visit Bill in Egypt with Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. Percy, who disapproved of what he termed their childish behavior, didn't spend much time in the Gryffindor common room. He had already told them pompously that he was only staying over Christmas because it was his duty as a prefect to support the teachers during this troubled time.

Christmas morning dawned, cold and white. Harry, and Ron, the only ones left in their dormitory, were woken very early by Hally first, then Hermione second, who was fully dressed and carrying presents for all of them.

“Wake up,” Hermione said loudly, pulling back the curtains at the window.

“Hermione, Hally—you’re not supposed to be in here...,” said Ron, shielding his eyes against the light.

“I can come and go in here as I please Ron, besides you don’t have anything that I want to see...Harry, we promised to be in dad’s quarters in an hour.” Hally spoke out

“Yeah Ron, and Merry Christmas to you, too,” said Hermione, throwing him his present. “Hally and I have been up for nearly an hour, adding more lacewings to the potion. It’s ready.”

Harry sat up, suddenly wide awake. “Are you sure?”

“Positive,” said Hermione, shifting Scabbers the rat so that she could sit down on the end of Ron’s four-poster. “If us three are going to do it, I say it should be tonight.”

At that moment, Hedwig swooped in, followed by Eros into the room, carrying a very small package in their beaks.

“Hello,” said Harry happily as Hedwig landed on his bed. “Are you and Eros speaking to us again?”

She nibbled on his ear affectionately while Eros landed upon Hally’s shoulder doing the same, which was a far better present than the ones that Hedwig and Eros had bought them, which turned out to be from Vernon Dursley. They each had gotten a toothpick and a note telling them that it was the only thing they deserved since they were related by marriage only and hoped that his divorce would end it swiftly.

“OOO! That fat pop toad!” Hally shouted out in anger throwing her toothpick into the fire grate inside Harry and Ron’s dormitory. She turned around to see Harry holding his out for her to do the same to his, grinning from ear to ear.

The rest of Harry and Hally's Christmas presents were far more satisfactory. Hagrid had sent them each a large tin of treacle fudge, which both twins decided to soften by the fire before eating. Ron had given Harry a book called *Flying with the Cannons*, a book of interesting facts about his favorite Quidditch team, and gave Hally a book of moste advanced potions level six. Hermione had bought Harry and Hally both a luxury eagle-feather quill each. Harry and Hally opened their last present to find a new, hand-knitted sweater and a large plum cake. They read their cards with a fresh surge of guilt, thinking about Mr. Weasley's car (which hadn't been seen since its crash with the Whomping Willow), and the bout of rule-breaking they and Ron were planning next.

No one, not even someone dreading taking Polyjuice Potion later, could fail to enjoy Christmas dinner at Hogwarts.

The Great Hall looked magnificent. Not only were there a dozen frost-covered Christmas trees and thick streamers of holly and mistletoe crisscrossing the ceiling, but enchanted snow was falling, warm and dry, from the ceiling. Dumbledore led them in a few of his favorite carols, Hagrid booming more and more loudly with every goblet of eggnog he consumed. Percy, who hadn't noticed that Fred had bewitched his prefect badge so that it read "Pinhead," kept asking them all what they were sniggering at. Harry and Hally didn't even care that Draco Malfoy was making loud, snide remarks about their new sweaters from the Slytherin table. With a bit of luck, Malfoy would be getting his comeuppance in a few hours' time.

Harry and Ron had barely finished their third helping of Christmas pudding when Hermione and Hally both ushered them out of the hall to finalize their plans for the evening.

"We still need a bit of the people you three will be changing into," said Hally matter-of-factly, as though she were sending them to the Muggle supermarket for laundry detergent. "And obviously, it'll be best if you can get something of Crabbe's and Goyle's; they're Malfoy's best friends...or should I say BIG FAT GORILLAS, he'll tell them anything. And we also need to make sure the real Crabbe and Goyle can't burst in on anyone of you two while you're interrogating him."

"I've got it all worked out," Hermione spoke out next, ignoring Harry's and Ron's stupefied faces. She held up two plump chocolate cakes. "I've filled these with a simple Sleeping Draught. All you have to do is make sure Crabbe and Goyle find them. Once they're asleep, pull out a few of their hairs and hide them in a broom closet."

Harry and Ron looked incredulously at each other.

"Hermione, I don't think..."

"That could go seriously wrong..."

But Hermione had a steely glint in her eye not unlike the one Professor McGonagall sometimes had. Hally simply crossed her arms with narrowed eyes at Ron more than her big brother Harry.

"The potion will be useless without Crabbe's and Goyle's hair," Hermione said sternly. "You do want to investigate Malfoy, don't you?"

"Oh, all right, all right," said Harry with a feigned sigh. "But what about you Hermione? Whose hair are you ripping out?"

Hally turned her head in wonderment next. "Yeah mione, whose hair are you ripping out?" Hally enquired next.

"I've already got mine!" said Hermione brightly, pulling a tiny bottle out of her pocket and showing them the single hair inside it. "Remember Millicent Bulstrode Wrestling with me at the Dueling Club? Well I asked her to help me fake that distraction. She left this on my robes when she was faked that strangling act on me! And she's gone home for Christmas--so I'll just have to tell the Slytherins I've decided to come back."

Hally's forehead creased slightly as she frowned, "Let's see that hair Hermione." She requested warily. She went to reach out for the vial, when Hermione tucked it into the inside pocket of her robes, as though she was waving Hally off without a care.

When Hermione had bustled off to check on the Polyjuice Potion again, Ron turned to Harry and Hally both with a doom-laden expression.

"Have you ever heard of a plan where so many things could go wrong?" he asked them

"No, but I have a feeling that Hermione will be having them quite soon," the twins spoke out at once after looking at one another quietly.

But to Harry, Hally, and Ron's amazement, stage one of the operation went just as smoothly as Hermione had said. They lurked in the deserted entrance hall after Christmas tea, waiting for Crabbe and Goyle who had remained alone at the Slytherin table, shoveling down fourth helpings of trifle. Harry perched cakes on the end of the banisters. When they spotted Crabbe and Goyle coming out of the Great Hall, Harry, Hally, and Ron hid quickly behind a suit of armor next to the front door.

"How thick can you get?" Ron whispered ecstatically as Crabbe gleefully pointed out the cakes to Goyle and grabbed them. Grinning stupidly, they stuffed the cakes whole into their large mouths. For a moment, both of them chewed greedily, looks of triumph on their faces. Then, without the smallest change of expression, they both keeled over backward onto the floor.

Hally let out an evil giggle, "They do share the same brain!" Both Harry and Ron couldn't help, but cackle at her comment.

By far the hardest part was hiding them in the closet across the hall. Once they were safely stowed among the buckets and mops, Harry yanked out a couple of the bristles that covered Goyle's forehead and Ron pulled out several of Crabbe's hairs while Hally volunteered as their lookout, making sure no one was coming in their direction. They also stole their shoes, because their own were far too small for Crabbe-and-Goyle-size feet. Then, still stunned at what they had just done, they sprinted up to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom.

They could hardly see for the thick black smoke issuing from the stall in which Hermione was stirring the cauldron, making sure that Hally's

Polyjuice Potion did not get ruined. Pulling their robes over their faces, Harry, and Ron knocked softly on the door with Hally waiting with them.

"Hermione?"

They heard the scrape of the lock and Hermione emerged, shiny-faced and looking anxious. Behind her they heard the gloop gloop of the bubbling, glutinous potion. Three glass tumblers stood ready on the toilet seat.

"Did you two get them?" Hermione asked breathlessly.

Harry showed her Goyle's hair.

"Good. And I sneaked these spare robes out of the laundry," Hermione said, holding up a small sack. "You'll both need bigger sizes once you're Crabbe and Goyle."

Hally opened her mouth to tease her twin brother, but Harry quickly covered it with his hand, seeing her eyes smile and dance at him.

"Don't even think about teasing me on that one Hal or I'll give you one of our own tickling charms," Harry warned with a evil grin on his face.

The four of them stared into the cauldron. Close up, the potion looked like thick, dark mud, bubbling sluggishly.

"Well, I'm sure Hally had done everything right...kidding Hally," Hermione said, nervously rereading the splotched page of Moste Potente Potions. "It looks like the book says it should...once we've drunk it, we'll have exactly an hour before we change back into ourselves."

"Now what?" Ron whispered.

"You separate it into three glasses and add the hairs," Hally told him smiling innocently and waved a hand at the potion. "Bottoms up Ron."

"Hally, stop teasing Ron...what I want to know is what do we do if that stuff does wear off before we slip away?" Hermione asked loudly until she, Harry, and Ron looked at Hally grinning from ear to ear.

"What? Oh no! I will not...play a googily eye girl with Malfoy! If you wanted that, you should have bribed Parkinson..."

"Come on Hal, just...distract him. If you have to...kiss him," Harry sniggered with Ron and Hermione

"You rotten brother...fine," Hally agreed in defeat "But I will not kiss him. I certainly will not hurt Cedric's feelings on that...blonde jerk!"

Hermione ladled large dollops of the potion into each of the glasses. Then, her hand trembling, she shook Millicent Bulstrode's hair out of its bottle into the first glass.

The potion hissed loudly like a boiling kettle and frothed madly. A second later, it had turned a sick sort of yellow.

"Urgh--essence of Millicent Bulstrode," said Ron, eyeing it with loathing. "Bet it tastes disgusting."

"Add yours, then," said Hermione while Hally without notice, took a closer look at Hermione's glass with narrowed eyes of suspicion.

Harry dropped Goyle's hair into the middle glass and Ron put Crabbe's into the last one. Both glasses hissed and frothed: Goyle's turned the khaki color of a booger, Crabbe's a dark, murky brown.

"Hang on," said Harry as Ron and Hermione reached for their glasses. "We'd better not all drink them in here...Once we turn into Crabbe and Goyle we won't fit. And Millicent Bulstrode's no pixie."

"that's a mean thing to say to one of our friends Harry," Hally replied, giving him a nudge with her elbow.

"Good thinking," said Ron, unlocking the door. "We'll take separate stalls."

Careful not to spill a drop of his Polyjuice Potion, Harry slipped into the middle stall, while Hally waited for them patiently.

"Ready?" he called.

"Ready," came Ron and Hermione's voices.

"One--two--three--"

Pinching his nose, Harry drank the potion down in two large gulps. It tasted like overcooked cabbage.

Immediately, his insides started writhing as though he'd just swallowed live snakes--doubled up, he wondered whether he was going to be sick and how the heck could his twin sister Hally be able to stand the effects, much less the taste--then a burning sensation spread rapidly from his stomach to the very ends of his fingers and toes--next, bringing him gasping to all fours, came a horrible melting feeling, as the skin all over his body bubbled like hot wax--and before his eyes, his hands began to grow, the fingers thickened, the nails broadened, the knuckles were bulging like bolts--his shoulders stretched painfully and a prickling on his forehead told him that hair was creeping down toward his eyebrows--his robes ripped as his chest expanded like a barrel bursting its hoops--his feet were agony in shoes four sizes too small--

As suddenly as it had started, everything stopped. Harry lay facedown on the stone-cold floor, listening to Myrtle gurgling morosely in the end toilet. With difficulty, he kicked off his shoes and stood up. So this was what it felt like, being Goyle. His large hand trembling, he pulled on the spare robes, which were hanging a foot above his ankles, pulled on the spare ones, and laced up Goyle's boatlike shoes. He reached up to brush his hair out of his eyes and met only the short growth of wiry bristles, low on his forehead.

"Are you two okay?" Goyle's low rasp of a voice issued from his mouth.

"Yeah," came the deep grunt of Crabbe from his right.

Hally straightened up just as Harry unlocked his door and stepped in front of the cracked mirror. Goyle stared back at him out of dull, deepest eyes. Harry scratched his ear. So did Goyle.

"Oh gods, I am going to have nightmares of having Goyle as a brother after this," Hally blurted out until Harry gave her a look through the mirror. "Sorry Harry."

Ron's door opened. They stared at each other. Except that he looked pale and shocked, Ron was indistinguishable from Crabbe, from the pudding-bowl haircut to the long, gorilla arms.

"This is unbelievable," said Ron, approaching the mirror and prodding Crabbe's flat nose. "Unbelievable."

"We'd better get going," said Harry, loosening the watch that was cutting into Goyle's thick wrist. "We've still got to go to the Slytherin common room and find Malfoy. I only hope we can find him..."

Ron, who had been gazing at Harry, said, "You don't know how bizarre it is to see Goyle thinking." He banged on Hermione's door. "C'mon, we need to go--"

"I--I don't think I'm going to come after all. You go on without me." came a high pitched voice from the other side.

Hally went to the door. "Hermione, you don't sound like Millicent. What..."

"Hermione, we know Millicent Bulstrode's ugly, no one's going to know it's you..."

"No--really--I don't think I'll come. You two hurry up, you're wasting time--"

Harry looked at Ron, bewildered.

"That looks more like Goyle," said Ron. "That's how he looks every time a teacher asks him a question."

"Hermione are you okay?" Said Harry through the door.

"Fine--I'm fine--go on--"

"You don't sound fine to me," Hally blurted out, trying to peer through the small crack of the stall door.

Harry looked at his watch. Five of their precious sixty minutes had already passed.

"We'll meet you back here then, all right?" he asked

Harry, Hally, and Ron opened the door of the bathroom carefully, checked that the coast was clear, and set off.

"Don't swing your arms like that," Harry muttered to Ron.

"Eh?"

"Crabbe holds them sort of stiff..."

"How's this?"

"Yeah, that's better..."

"Um...I think it's time for me to separate from you two. Sorry, but everyone knows that Lady hex does not hang around..."

"We know Hally, we'll see you in the Slytherin common room." Harry and Ron said at one time.

Hally nodded her head at them, "Yep, you definately have the shared brain part down right...oh look! There goes Blaise! Bye!" Hally sniggered and slipped away swiftly after hearing Harry and Ron growl at her in anger.

They went down the marble staircase. All they needed now was that one Slytherin that they were looking for to show up as they neared the Slytherin common room's entrance, but there was nobody around.

"Any ideas?" muttered Harry.

"Well, the Slytherins always come up to breakfast from over there," Ron said, nodding at the entrance to the dungeons. The words had barely left his mouth when a girl with long, curly hair emerged from the entrance.

Ron without thinking hurried up to her. "Ron..."

"Excuse me," said Ron. "We've forgotten the password to our common room."

"I beg your pardon?" said the girl stiffly. "Our common room? I'm a Ravenclaw."

She walked away, looking suspiciously back at them.

Harry and Ron hurried down the steps into the darkness, their footsteps echoing particularly loudly as Crabbe's and Goyle's huge feet hit the floor, feeling that this wasn't going to be as easy as they had hoped in finding Draco Malfoy.

The labyrinthine passages were deserted. They walked deeper and deeper under the school, constantly checking their watches to see how much time they had left. After a quarter of an hour, just when they were getting desperate, they heard a sudden movement ahead.

"Ha!" said Ron excitedly. "There's one of them Slytherins now!"

The figure was emerging from a side room. As they hurried nearer, however, their hearts sank. It wasn't a Slytherin, it was Percy.

"What're you doing down here?" said Ron in surprise.

Percy looked affronted.

"That," he said stiffly, "is none of your business. It's Crabbe, isn't it?"

"Wh--oh, yeah," said Ron.

"Well, get off to your dormitories," said Percy sternly. "It's not safe to go wandering around the dark corridors these days."

"You are," Ron pointed out.

"I," said Percy, drawing himself up, "am a prefect. Nothing's about to attack me."

A voice suddenly echoed behind Harry and Ron. Draco Malfoy was strolling toward them, and for the first time in his life, Harry was pleased to see him.

"There you are," he drawled, looking at them. "Have you two been pigging out in the Great Hall all this time? I've been looking for you; I want to show you something really funny."

Malfoy glanced witheringly at Percy.

"And what're you doing down here, Weasley?" he sneered

Percy looked outraged

"You want to show a bit more respect to a school prefect!" he said. "I don't like your attitude!"

Malfoy sneered and motioned for Harry and Ron to follow him.

Harry almost said something apologetic to Percy but caught himself just in time. He and Ron hurried after Malfoy, who said as they turned into the next passage. "That Peter Weasley--"

"Percy," Ron corrected him automatically.

"Whatever," said Malfoy. "I've noticed him sneaking around a lot lately. And I bet I know what he's up to. He thinks he's going to catch Slytherin's heir single-handed."

He gave a short, derisive laugh. Harry and Ron exchanged excited looks.

Malfoy paused by a stretch of bare, damp stone wall.

"What's the new password again?" he said to Harry.

"Er--" said Harry.

"Oh, yeah--Pure-blood!" said Malfoy, not listening and a stone door concealed in the wall slid open. Malfoy marched through it, and Harry and Ron followed him.

The Slytherin common room was a long, low underground room with rough stone walls and ceiling from which round, greenish lamps were hanging on chains. A fire was crackling under an elaborately carved mantelpiece ahead of them, and several Slytherins were silhouetted around it in high-backed chairs. Farther on the left side of the common room was Hally sitting beside Blaise Zabini, watching the three with her arms crossed and conversing with the other girl. She rolled her eyes at them right on cue as though she despised Harry with disdain.

"Humph! I see that little Potter is here as usual," Malfoy sneered towards Hally's way, then looked at Harry and Ron, motioning them to a pair of empty chairs set back from the fire. "Wait here. I'll go and get it--my father's just sent it to me--"

Wondering what Malfoy was going to show them, Harry and Ron sat down, doing their best to look at home.

Malfoy came back a minute later, holding what looked like a newspaper clipping. He thrust it under Ron's nose.

"That'll give you a laugh," he said.

Harry saw Ron's eyes widen in shock. He read the clipping quickly, gave a very forced laugh, and handed it to Harry.

It had been clipped out of the Daily Prophet, and it said:

INQUIRY AT THE MINISTRY OF MAGIC

Arthur Weasley, Head of Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, was today fined fifty Galleons for bewitching a Muggle car.

Mr. Lucius Malfoy, a governor of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where the enchanted car crashed earlier this year, called today for Mr. Weasley's resignation.

"Weasley has brought the Ministry into disrepute," Mr. Malfoy told our reporter. "He is clearly unfit to draw up our laws and his ridiculous Muggle Protection Act should be scrapped immediately."

Mr. Weasley was unavailable for comment, although his wife told reporters to clear off or she'd set the family ghoul on them.

"Well?" said Malfoy impatiently as Harry handed the clipping back to him. "Don't you think it's funny?"

"Ha, ha," said Harry bleakly.

"Arthur Weasley loves Muggles so much he should snap his wand in half and go and join them," said Malfoy scornfully. "You'd never know the Weasleys were pure-bloods, the way they behave."

Ron's--or rather Crabbe's--face was contorted with fury.

"What's up with you, Crabbe?" snapped Malfoy.

"Stomachache," Ron grunted.

"Well, go up to the hospital wing and give all those Mudbloods a kick from me," said Malfoy, snickering. "You know, I'm surprised the Daily Prophet hasn't reported all these attacks yet," he went on thoughtfully. "I suppose Dumbledore's trying to hush it all up. He'll be sacked if it doesn't stop soon. Father's always said old Dumbledore's the worst thing that's ever happened to this place. He loves Muggle-borns. A decent headmaster would never've let slime like that Creevey in."

Malfoy started taking pictures with an imaginary camera and did a cruel but accurate impression of Colin. "Potters, can I have your

picture, Potters? Can I have your autographs? Can I lick your shoes, please, Potters?"

He dropped his hands and looked at Harry and Ron.

"What's the matter with you two?"

Far too late, Harry and Ron forced themselves to laugh, but Malfoy seemed satisfied; perhaps Crabbe and Goyle were always slow on the uptake.

"Saint Potters, the Mudbloods' friends," said Malfoy slowly. "Those two are another one with no proper wizard feelings, or they wouldn't go around with that jumped up Granger Mudblood. And people think they're the heirs of Slytherin!"

Harry and Ron waited with bated breath: Malfoy was surely seconds away from telling them it was him--but then--

"I wish I knew who it is," said Malfoy petulantly. "I could help them."

Ron's jaw dropped so that Crabbe looked even more clueless than usual. Fortunately, Malfoy didn't notice, and Harry, thinking fast, said, "You must have some idea who's behind it all..."

"You know I haven't, Goyle, how many times do I have to tell you?" snapped Malfoy. "And father won't tell me anything about the last time the Chamber was opened either. Of course, it was fifty years ago, so it was before his time, but he knows all about it, and he says that it was all kept quiet and it'll look suspicious if I know too much about it. But I know one thing--last time the Chamber of Secrets was opened, a Mudblood died. So I bet it's a matter of time before one of them's killed this time...I hope it's Granger," he said with relish.

Ron was clenching Crabbe's gigantic fists. Feeling that it would be a bit of a giveaway if Ron punched Malfoy, Harry shot him a warning look and said, "D'you know if the person who opened the Chamber last time was caught?"

"Oh, yeah...whoever it was was expelled," said Malfoy. "They're probably still in Azkaban."

"Azkaban?" said Harry, puzzled.

"Azkaban--the wizard prison, Goyle," said Malfoy, looking at him in disbelief. "Honestly, if you were any slower, you'd be going backward."

He shifted restlessly in his chair and said, "Father says to keep my head down and let the heir of Slytherin get on with it. He says the school needs ridding of all the Mudblood filth, but not to get mixed up in it. Of course, he's got a lot on his plate at the moment. You know the Ministry of Magic raided our manor last week?"

Harry tried to force Goyle's dull face into a look of concern.

"Yeah..." said Malfoy. "Luckily, they didn't find much. Father's got some very valuable Dark Arts stuff. But luckily, we've got our own secret chamber under the drawing-room floor--"

"HO!" said Ron

Malfoy looked at him. So did Harry. Ron blushed. Even his hair was turning red. His nose was also slowly lengthening--their hour was up, Ron was turning back into himself, and from the look of horror he was suddenly giving Harry, he must be, too.

Hally leaned forward from where she was sitting before shaking her head, knowing that it was time for her part at that moment. she stood up and started to head in their direction.

Both boys jumped to their feet.

"Medicine for my stomach," Ron grunted, and without further ado they sprinted the length of the Slytherin common room, hurled themselves at the stone wall, and dashed up the passage, hoping against hope that Malfoy hadn't noticed anything.

Draco Malfoy watched the two quick head out of the common room.

"Hey! Where're you two going..."

"Hey Malfoy!"

Draco turned around to find Hally right behind him. He curled his lip at her.

"What do you want little P--

"MISTLETOE!" Hally quickly planted her lips upon Malfoy's, silencing him swiftly. She backed away finding him with a dazed expression on his face, then made a beeline out of the common room with Blaise following behind.

"Now you have to wash out your mouth Hally," Blaise exclaimed as they met up with Harry and Ron.

"Please don't remind me...come on you two!" Hally cried out taking off with Harry and Ron.

Harry could feel his feet slipping around in Goyle's huge shoes and had to hoist up his robes as he shrank; they crashed up the steps into the dark entrance hall, which was full of a muffled pounding coming from the closet where they'd locked Crabbe and Goyle. Leaving their shoes outside the closet door, they all sprinted in their socks up the marble staircase toward Moaning Myrtle's bathroom.

"Well, it wasn't a complete waste of time," Ron panted, closing the bathroom door behind them. "I know we still haven't found out who's doing the attacks, but I'm going to write to dad tomorrow and tell him to check under the Malfoy's drawing room."

Harry checked his face in the cracked mirror. He was back to normal. He turned around as Ron hammered on the door of Hermione's stall.

"Hermione, come out, we've got loads to tell you--"

"Go away!" Hermione squeaked.

Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Ron looked at each other.

"What's the matter?" said Ron. "You must be back to normal by now, we are--"

But Moaning Myrtle glided suddenly through the stall door. Harry and Hally both had never seen her looking so happy.

"Ooooooh, wait till you see," she said. "It's awful--"

They heard the lock slide back and Hermione emerged, sobbing, her robes pulled up over her head.

"What's up?" Ron asked uncertainly. "Have you still got Millicent's nose or something?"

Hermione let her robes fall and Ron backed into the sink.

Her face was covered in black fur. Her eyes had turned yellow and there were long, pointed ears poking through her hair.

"It was a c-cat hair!" she howled. "M-Millicent Bulstrode m-must have a cat! And the p-potion isn't supposed to be used for animal transformations!"

"Uh-oh," said Ron.

"You'll be teased something dreadful," said Myrtle happily.

"It's okay, Hermione," said Harry quickly. "We'll take you up to the hospital wing. Madam Pomfrey never asks too many questions..."

Hally bursted in laughter after she couldn't hold it in any longer. "Look at that cute bushy tail!" she laughed hysterically

It took a long time to persuade Hermione to leave the bathroom. Moaning Myrtle sped them on their way with a hearty guffaw. "Wait till everyone finds out you've got a tail!"

Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Ron cackled along with Moaning Myrtle, but also trying to keep Hermione from feeling worse as they made their way to the hospital wing.

A/N: That is all for chapter 23. See you in chapter 24. bye for now.

Chapter 24 THE VERY SECRET DIARY

Hermione remained in the hospital wing for several weeks. There was a flurry of rumor about her disappearance when the rest of the school arrived back from their Christmas holidays, because of course everyone thought that she had been attacked. So many students filed past the hospital wing trying to catch a glimpse of her that Madam Pomfrey took out her curtains again and placed them around Hermione's bed, to spare her the shame of being seen with a furry face.

Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Ron went to visit her every evening. When the new terms started, they brought her each day's homework.

"If I'd sprouted whiskers, I'd take a break from work," said Ron, tipping a stack of books onto Hermione's bedside table one evening.

"Don't be silly Ron, I've got to keep up," Hermione said briskly. Her spirits were greatly improved by the fact that all the hair had gone from her face and her eyes were turning slowly back to brown. "I don't suppose you've got any new leads?" she added in a whisper, so that Madam Pomfrey couldn't hear her.

"Nothing," Harry and Hally answered gloomily at one time.

"I was sure it was Malfoy," said Ron, for about the hundredth time.

Hally snapped her attention his way, "Could you get of the Malfoy kick Ron? We already know that it wasn't him, now lay off!" Hally seethed quietly

"Oh, sorry. I keep forgetting...you had to kiss him that night so he wouldn't find out that it was me and Harry disguised as Crabbe and Goyle," Ron sniggered suddenly with Harry and Blaise.

Hermione looked over at Hally with wide eyes, "Oh my gods! Hally did you actually kiss Malfoy?" she asked in wonder

Hally glanced at her before nodding, "Hally and Malfoy up in the Whomping Willow tree! K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" Hermione and Blaise sung out, teasing Hally as she blushed three shades of pink.

"All right, all right now, Hal had enough...Malfoy lover," Harry coughed into his hand before cackling at his twin sister

"Shut up Harry," Hally replied, getting angrier each second as they continued with their teasing.

"What will poor Cedric say if he found out about this," Ron grinned

"You say anything and I'll make sure that you'll be using your feet to eat your meals!" Hally warned the red-haired boy. The four cackled at her remark.

"Oh calm down Hal, no one is going to say anything," Harry grinned from ear to ear, then noticed something along with Hally. "What's that?" he asked, pointing to something gold sticking out from under Hermione's pillow.

"Just a get well card," said Hermione hastily, trying to poke it out of sight, but Ron was too quick for her. He pulled it out, flicked it open, and read it aloud;

"To Miss Granger, wishing you a speedy recovery, from your concerned teacher, Gilderoy Lockhart, Order of Merlin, Third Class, Honorary Member of the Dark Force Defense League, and five-time winner of Witch Weekly's Most-Charming-Smile Award."

Ron looked up at Hermione, disgusted with Harry while Hally shuddered with revulsion over their Dark Arts Professor.

"You sleep with this under your pillow?"

But Hermione was spared answering by Madam Pomfrey sweeping over with her evening dose of medicine.

"Is Lockhart the smarmiest bloke you've ever met, or what?" Ron said to Harry quietly as they left the infirmary and started up the stairs

toward Gryffindor Tower. The twins' father Professor Severus Snape had given them so much homework, Harry thought he was likely to be in sixth year before he finished it until Hally explained to him that all second years receives that much from him every year. Ron was just saying he wished he had asked Hermione how many rat tails you were supposed to add to a Hair-Raising Potion when an angry outburst from the floor above reached their ears.

"That's Filch," Harry and Hally muttered as they hurried up the stairs and paused, out of sight, listening hard.

"You two don't think someone else's been attacked?" Ron asked tensely.

They stood still, their heads inclined toward Filch's voice, which sounded quite hysterical.

"—even more work for me! Mopping all night, like I haven't got enough to do! No, this is the final straw, I'm going to Dumbledore...."

His footsteps receded along the out-of-sight corridor and they heard a distant door slam.

They poked their heads around the corner. Filch had clearly been manning his usual lookout post: They were once again on the spot where Mrs. Norris had been attacked. They saw at a glance what Filch had been shouting about. A great flood of water stretched over half the corridor, and it looked as though it was still seeping from under the door of Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. Now that Filch had stopped shouting, they could hear Myrtle's wails echoing off the bathroom walls.

"Now what's up with her?" asked Ron.

"Let's go and see," said Harry and Hally both, and holding their robes over their ankles they stepped through the great wash of water to the door bearing its OUT OF ORDER sign, ignored it as always, and entered.

Moaning Myrtle was crying, if possible, louder, and harder than ever before. She seemed to be hiding down her usual toilet. It was dark in the bathroom because the candles had been extinguished in the great rush of water that had left both walls and floor soaking wet.

“What’s up Myrtle?” Said Harry. Hally simply shook her head sighing

“Who’s that?” glugged Myrtle miserably. “Come to throw something else at me?”

Hally snapped her head back in confusion. Harry waded across to her stall and said, “Why would we throw something at you....Shut up Hal!” Harry replied just as he seen his little sister get ready to make a remark over his question to Myrtle.

“Don’t ask me,” Myrtle shouted, emerging with a wave of yet more water, which splashed onto the already sopping floor. “Here I am, minding my own business, and someone thinks it’s funny to throw a book at me....”

“But it can’t hurt you if someone throws something at you,” Harry said, reasonably. “I mean, it’d just go right through you, wouldn’t it?”

“Oh, bad form big brother,” Hally shook her head, taking a step back warily.

Harry had said the wrong thing. Myrtle puffed herself up and shrieked, “Let’s all throw books at Myrtle, because she can’t feel it! Ten points if you can get it through her stomach! Fifty points if it goes through her head! Well, ha, ha, ha! What a lovely game, I don’t think!”

“Knock it off Myrtle! It wasn’t us! We just got here!” Hally yelled out, making Myrtle stop abruptly.

“Who threw it at you, anyway?” asked Harry.

“I don’t know....I was just sitting in the U-bend, thinking about death, and it fell right through the top of my head,” said Myrtle, glaring at them. “It’s over there, it got washed out....”

Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Ron looked under the sink where Myrtle was pointing. A small, thin book lay there. It had a shabby black cover and was as wet as everything else in the bathroom. Harry stepped forward to pick it up, but Ron suddenly flung out an arm to hold him back.

“What?” said Harry.

“Are you crazy?” said Ron. “It could be dangerous.”

“Dangerous?” said Harry, laughing. “Come off it, how could it be dangerous?”

“Um...Harry, Ron has a point this time,” Hally intervened, tilting her head slightly at the small-thin book. Harry looked at his sister in shock...it was the first time he ever heard Hally agree with Ron.

“You’d be surprised Harry,” said Ron, who was looking apprehensively at the book. “Some of the books the Ministry’s confiscated—Dad’s told me—there was one that burned your eyes out. And everyone who read Sonnets of a Sorcerer spoke in limericks for the rest of their lives. And some old witch in Bath had a book that you could never stop reading! You just had to wander around with your nose in it, trying to do everything one-handed. And....”

“All right, I’ve got the point,” said Harry.

The little book lay on the floor, nondescript and soggy.

“Well, we won’t find out unless we look at it,” he said, and he ducked around Ron and picked it up off the floor.

The twins saw at once that it was a diary, and the faded year on the cover told them it was fifty years old. Harry opened it eagerly. On the first page they could just make out the name “T.M. Riddle” in smudged ink.

“Hang on,” said Ron, who had approached cautiously and was looking over the twins’ shoulders. “I know that name....T.M. Riddle got an award for special services to the school fifty years ago.”

"How on earth d'you know that?" said Harry in amazement.

"Because Filch made me polish his shield about fifty times in detention," said Ron resentfully. "That was the one I burped slugs all over. If you'd wiped slime off a name for an hour, you'd remember it, too...oh shut up Hally," Ron groaned after hearing Hally giggle over his comment.

Harry peeled the wet pages apart. They were completely blank. There wasn't the faintest trace of writing on any of them, not even Auntie Mabel's birthday, or dentist, half-past three.

"He never wrote in it," said Harry and Hally, disappointed.

"I wonder why someone wanted to flush it away?" said Ron curiously.

Harry turned to the back cover of the book and saw the printed name of a variety store on Vauxhall Road, London.

"He must've been Muggle-born," said Harry thoughtfully. "To have brought a diary from Vauxhall Road...."

"That is strange, I've heard about that place just from hearing some of our house mates," Hally commented thoughtfully.

"Well, it's not much use to you two," said Ron. He dropped his voice. "Fifty points if you can get it through Myrtle's nose."

Hally had to stifle a giggle. Harry, however, pocketed it.

Hermione left the hospital wing, de-whiskered, tail-less, and fur-free, at the beginning of February. On her first evening back in Gryffindor tower, Harry and Hally showed her T.M. Riddle's diary and told her the story of how they had found it.

"Oooh, it might have hidden powers," said Hermione enthusiastically, taking the diary and looking at it closely.

"If it has, it's hiding them very well," said Ron. "Maybe it's shy. I don't know why you don't chuck it Harry."

"I wish I knew why someone did try to chuck it," said Harry. "I wouldn't mind knowing how Riddle got an award for special services to Hogwarts either."

"Could've been anything," said Ron. "Maybe he got thirty O.W.L.s or saved a teacher from the giant Squid. Maybe he murdered Myrtle; that would've done everyone a favor..."

Hally made a face at Ron, "No one ever got an award for having thirty O.W.L.s here Ron, and The giant squid is harmless...but Myrtle? I don't know, but that is going a bit too far." she stated

But Harry could tell from the arrested look on Hermione's face that she was thinking what he was thinking along with his little sister at that moment.

"What?" said Ron, looking from one to the other.

"Well, the Chamber of Secrets was opened fifty years ago, wasn't it?" Harry said. "That's what Malfoy said."

"Yeah..." said Ron slowly.

"And this diary is fifty years old," said Hermione, tapping it excitedly.

"So?"

"Oh, Ron, wake up," snapped Hermione. "We know the person who opened the Chamber last time was expelled fifty years ago. We know T.M. Riddle got an award for special services to the school fifty years ago. Well, what if Riddle got his special award for catching the Heir of Slytherin? His diary would probably tell us everything--where the Chamber is, and how to open it, and what sort of creature lives in it--the person who's behind the attacks this time wouldn't want that lying around, would they?"

"That's a brilliant theory, Hermione," Ron said, "with just one tiny flaw. There's nothing written in his diary."

But Hermione was pulling her wand out of her bag.

"It might be invisible ink!" Hermione whispered.

She tapped the diary three times and said, "Aparecium!"

Nothing happened. Undaunted, Hermione shoved her hand back into her bag and pulled out what appeared to be a bright red eraser.

"It's a revealer, I got it in Diagon Alley," she said.

She rubbed hard on January first. Nothing happened.

"I'm telling you, there's nothing to find n there," said Ron. "Riddle just got a diary for Christmas and couldn't be bothered filling it in."

Harry and Hally couldn't explain, even to themselves, why Harry didn't just throw Riddle's diary away. The fact that even though they knew the diary was blank, Harry kept absentmindedly picking it up and turning the pages, as though it were a story that he and Hally both would want to finish. And while Harry was sure he had never heard the name T.M. Riddle before, and that his sister had by stating that she always went past it while playing with Peeves in the past, it seemed to mean something to them both, almost as though Riddle was a friend they'd had when they were very small, and had ead half-forgotten. But this was absurd. Harry never had friends before Hogwarts, Dudley had made sure of that, even if his twin did being separated for the past ten years.

Nevertheless, Harry and Hally was both determined to find out more about Riddle, so next day at break, they headed for the trophy room with Hally leading the way to examine Riddle's special award, accompanied by an interested Hermione, and a thoroughly unconvinced Ron, who told them he'd seen enough of the trophy room to last him a lifetime.

Riddle's burnished gold shield was tucked away in a corner cabinet. It didn't carry details of why it had been given to him ("Good thing, too, or it'd be even bigger and I'd still be polishing it," said Ron). However, they did find Riddle's name on an old Medal for Magical Merit, and on a list of old Head Boys.

"He sounds like Percy," said Ron, wrinkling his nose in disgust. "Prefect, Head Boy...probably top of every class..."

"You say that like it's a bad thing," said Hermione in a slightly hurt voice.

The sun had now begun to shine weakly on Hogwarts again. Inside the castle, the mood had grown more hopeful. There had been no more attacks since those on Justin and Nearly Headless Nick, and Madam Pomfrey was pleased to report that the Mandrakes were becoming moody and secretive, meaning that they were fast leaving childhood.

"The moment their acne clears up, they'll be ready for repotting again," The twins heard her telling Filch kindly one afternoon. "And after that, it won't be long until we're cutting them up and stewing them. You'll have Mrs. Norris back in no time."

Perhaps the Heir of Slytherin had lost his or her nerve, thought Harry and Hally. It must be getting riskier and riskier to open the Chamber of Secrets, with the school so alert and suspicious. Perhaps the monster, whatever it was, was even now settling itself down to hibernate for another fifty years...

Ernie Macmillan of Hufflepuff didn't take this cheerful view. He was still convinced that Harry and Hally both was the guilty ones, that they had "given themselves away" at the Dueling Club. Peeves wasn't helping matters; he kept popping up in the crowded corridor singing "Oh Potters, you rotters..." now with a dance routine to match. It had gotten to Hally so much to when one day she heard him above her and Harry singing the tune, that when Peeves went to greet her, she simply walked away, not acknowledging her poltergeist friend which continued on for many days.

Gilderoy Lockhart seemed to think he himself had made the attacks stop. Both twins overheard him telling Professor McGonagall so while the Gryffindors were lining up for Transfiguration.

"I don't think there'll be any more trouble Minerva," he said, tapping his nose knowingly and winking. "I think the Chamber has been locked for good this time. The culprit must have known it was only a matter of time before I caught him. Rather sensible to stop now, before I came down hard on him."

"How about if they had came down hard on you instead fraudy boy," Hally blurted out while rolling her eyes at the Dark Arts Professor.

McGonagall's lip twitched as she held a straight face, keeping herself from laughing at Hally's outburst.

Lockhart ignored her however, as usual. "You know, what the school needs now is a morale-booster. Wash away the memories of last term! I won't say any more just now, but I think I know just the thing..."

He tapped his nose again and strode off. Hally lifted her hand over her mouth "NEIGH! NEIGH!" she imitated a sound of a horse neighing letting the sound fall onto Lockhart. The boys roared into laughter.

"Miss Potter...oh never mind, he most certainly is," McGonagall giggled warmly allowing the students to enter the classroom.

Lockhart's idea of a morale-booster became clear at breakfast time on February fourteenth. Harry nor Hally had much sleep because of a late-running Quidditch practice the night before, and they hurried down to the Great Hall, slightly late. They thought, for a moment, that they had walked through the wrong doors.

The walls were all covered with large, lurid pink flowers. Worse still, heart-shaped confetti was falling from the pale blue ceiling. The twins slowly went over to the Gryffindor table first, where Ron was sitting looking sickened, and Hermione seemed to have been overcome with giggles.

"What's going on?" both twins asked at once, sitting down and wiping confetti off of their own piece of bacon.

Ron pointed to the teacher's table, apparently too disgusted to speak. Lockhart, wearing lurid pink robes to match the decorations, was waving for silence. The teachers on either side of him were looking stony-faced. From where they sat, Harry and Hally could see a muscle going in Professor McGonagall's cheek. Their father, Severus Snape looked as though someone had just fed him a large beaker of Skele-gro.

"Happy Valentine's Day!" Lockhart shouted. "And may I thank the forty-six people who have so far sent me cards! Yes, I have taken the liberty of arranging this little surprise for you all--and it doesn't end there!"

Harry's mouth dropped open while Hally looked around her having a complex over the decorations. "Oh gods Lockhart flipped his lid," Harry muttered

"My life is flashing before my eyes! It looks like Pansy Parkinson on a rampage!" Hally cried out in disgust.

Lockhart clapped his hands and through the doors to the entrance hall marched a dozen surly-looking dwarfs. Not just any dwarfs, however. Lockhart had them all wearing golden wings and carrying harps.

"My friendly, card-carrying cupids!" beamed Lockhart. "They will be roving around the school today delivering your valentines! And the fun doesn't stop here! I'm sure my colleagues will want to enter the spirit of the occasion! Why not ask Professor Snape to show you how to whip up a Love Potion! And while you're at it, Professor Flitwick knows more about Entrancing Enchantments than any wizard I've ever met, the sly old dog!"

Professor Flitwick buried his face in his hands. Severus was looking as though the first person to ask him for a Love Potion would be force-fed poison.

"Oh, dad is definitely not happy about this," The twins replied simultaneously

"Please, Hermione, tell me you weren't one of the forty-six," said Ron as they left the Great Hall for their first lesson. Hermione suddenly became very interested in searching her bag for her schedule and didn't answer.

All day long, the dwarfs kept barging into their classes to deliver valentines, to the annoyance of the teachers, and late that afternoon as the Gryffindors were walking upstairs for Charms, one of the dwarfs caught up with Harry, which surprised Hally very much.

"Oy, you! 'Arry Potter!" shouted a particularly grin-looking dwarf, elbowing people out of the way to get to Harry.

Hot all over at the thought of being given a valentine in front of a line of first years, which happened to include Ginny Weasley, Harry tried to escape with the help of his little sister. The dwarf, however, cut his way through the crowd by kicking people's shins, and reached him before he'd gone two paces.

"I've got a musical message to deliver to 'Arry Potter in person," he said, twanging his harp in a threatening sort of way.

"Not here," Harry hissed, trying to escape

"Later," Hally whispered grabbing her brothers arm.

"Stay still!" grunted the dwarf, grabbing hold of Harry's bag and pulling him back with Hally bumping into him.

"Let me go!" Harry snarled with Hally, tugging together.

With a loud ripping noise, Harry's bag split in two. His books, parchment, and quill spilled onto the floor and his ink bottle smashed over everything.

Both twins scrambled around, trying to pick it all up before the dwarf started singing, causing something of a holdup in the corridor.

"What's going on here?" came the cold, drawling voice of Draco Malfoy. Harry and Hally started stuffing everything feverishly into Harry's ripped bag, desperate to get away before Malfoy could hear Harry's musical valentine.

"What's all this commotion?" said another familiar voice as Percy Weasley arrived.

Losing their heads, the twins tried to make a run for it, but the dwarf siezed Harry around the knees and brought him crashing to the floor with Hally following him from being knocked off balance.

"Right," he said, sitting on Harry's ankles. "Here is your singing valentine:

His eyes are as green as a fresh pickled toad, His hair is as dark as a blackboard. I wish he was mine, he's really devine, One of the heroes who conquered the Dark Lord

Harry would have given all the gold in Gringotts to evaporate on the spot. Trying valiantly to laugh along with everyone else, He and Hally got up, his feet numb from the weight of the dwarf, as Percy Weasley did his best to disperse the crowd, some of whom were crying with mirth.

"Off you go, off you go, the bell rang five minutes ago, off to class now," he said, shooin some of the younger students away. "And you, Malfoy..."

The twins, glancing over, saw Malfoy stoop and snatch up something. Leering, he showed it to Crabbe and Goyle, and both twins realized that he'd got Riddle's diary.

"Give that back," Harry said quietly.

"Wonder what Potter's written in this?" said Malfoy, who obviously hadn't noticed the year on the cover and thought he had Harry's own diary. A hush fell over the onlookers. Ginny was staring from the diary to both Harry and Hally, looking terrified.

"Hand it over, Malfoy," said Percy sternly.

"When I've had a look," said Malfoy, waving the diary tauntingly at Harry.

Percy said, "As a school prefect--" but Harry had lost his temper. He pulled out his wand and shouted, "expelliarmus!" and just as Severus had disarmed Lockhart, so Malfoy found the diary shooting out of his hand into the air. Ron, grinning broadly, caught it.

"Harry!" said Percy loudly. "No magic in the corridors. I'll have to report this, you know!"

But neither twin didn't care. they was one-up on Malfoy, and that was worth five points from Gryffindor any day. Malfoy was looking furious, and as Ginny passed him to enter her classroom, he yelled spitefully after her, " I don't think Potter liked your valentine much!"

Ginny covered her face with her hands and ran into class. Snarling, Ron pulled out his wand, too. But the twins pulled him away. Ron didn't need to spend the whole of Charms belching slugs.

It wasn't until they had reached Professor Flitwick's class that Harry and Hally noticed something rather odd about Riddle's diary. All his other books were drenched in scarlet ink. The diary, however, was as clean as it had been before the ink bottle had smashed all over it. They tried to point this out to Ron, but Ron was having trouble with his wand again; large purple bubbles were blossoming out of the end, and he wasn't much interested in anything else.

Harry and Hally went to bed before anyone else in their dormitories that night. This was partly because they didn't think they could stand Fred and George singing, "His eyes are as green as a fresh pickled toad!" one more time, and partly because they wanted to examine Riddle's diary again, and knew Ron thought they were wasting their time. So at the exactly nine that night as agreed, Hally slipped into Harry's dormitory, climbing upon his bed to sit in the middle while Harry drew his curtains closed before they lit up the tips of their wands for light.

With Hally close by, Harry sat beside her on his four-poster and flicked through the blank pages, not one of which had a trace of scarlet ink on it. Then he pulled out a new bottle of ink from his bedside cabinet, dipped his quill into it, and dropped a blot onto the first page of the diary. They both waited with anticipation.

The ink shone brightly on the paper for a second and then, as though it was being sucked into the page, vanished. Excited, Harry loaded up his quill a second time and wrote, "Our name is Harry and Hally Potter."

The words shone momentarily on the page and they, too, sank without a trace. Then at last, something happened.

Oozing back out of the page, in his very own ink, came words Harry had never written.

"Hello, Harry and Hally Potter. My name is Tom Riddle. How did you two come by my diary?"

These words, too, faded away, but not before Harry had started to scribble back.

"Someone tried to flush it down a toilet."

They waited eagerly for Riddle's reply.

"Lucky that I recorded my memories in some more lasting way than ink. But I always knew that there would be those who would not want this diary read."

"What do you mean?" Harry scrawled, blotting the page in his excitement while Hally watched in silence, letting her brother write for the both of them.

"I mean that this diary holds memories of terrible things. Things that were covered up. Things that happened at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"That's where we are now," Harry wrote quickly. "We're both at Hogwarts, and horrible stuff's been happening. Do you know anything about the Chamber of Secrets?"

Their hearts were hammering. Riddle's reply came quickly, his writing becoming untidier, as though he was hurrying to tell all he knew.

"Of course I know about the Chamber of Secrets. In my day, they told us it was a legend, that it did not exist. But this was a lie. In my fifth year, the Chamber was opened and the monster attacked several students, finally killing one. I caught the person who'd opened the Chamber and he was expelled. But the Headmaster, Professor Dippet, ashamed that such a thing had happened at Hogwarts, forbade me to tell the truth. A story was given out that the girl had died in a freak accident. They gave me a nice, shiny, engraved trophy for my trouble and warned me to keep my mouth shut. But I knew it could happen again. The monster lived on, and the one who had the power to release it was not imprisoned."

Harry nearly upset his ink bottle in his hurry to write back. Hally, however, was finding that something was missing from the story, but did not know what.

"It's happening again now. There have been three attacks and no one seems to know who's behind them. Who was it last time?"

"I can only show you two, if you like," came Riddle's reply. "You two don't have to take my word for it. I can take you both inside my memory of the night when I caught him."

Harry hesitated, his quill suspended over the diary. What did Riddle mean? How could he and his sister be taken inside somebody else's memory? He peered out through his curtains nervously at the door to the dormitory, which was growing dark. He looked at Hally who only shrugged her shoulders, and then looked back at the diary, he saw fresh words forming before them once more.

"Let me show you two."

They both paused for a fraction of a second, before Harry wrote two letters down.

"OK"

The pages of the diary began to blow as though caught in a high wind, stopping halfway through the month of June. Mouths hanging open, Harry and Hally saw that the little square for June thirteenth seemed to have turned into a miniscule television screen. Their hands trembled slightly as Harry raised the book so that their eyes could get a better view against the window, and before they knew what was happening, they was tilting forward; the window was widening, they felt their bodies leave Harry's bed, and they was pitched headfirst through the opening in the page, into a whirl of color and shadow.

They felt their feet hit solid ground, and stood, shaking, as the blurred shapes around them came suddenly into focus.

They knew immediately where they was. This circular room with the sleeping portraits was Dumbledore's office--but it wasn't Dumbledore who was sitting behind the desk. A wizened, frail-looking wizard, bald except for a few wisps of white hair, was reading a letter by candlelight. Both twins had never seen him before.

"I'm sorry," they said shakily, "We didn't mean to butt in..."

But the wizard didn't look up. He continued to read, frowning slightly. Harry and Hally drew nearer to his desk and Harry stammered, "Er--we'll just go, shall we?"

Still the wizard ignored them. He didn't seem even to have heard Harry. Thinking that the wizard might be deaf, Harry raised his voice.

"Sorry we disturbed you. We'll go now," he half-shouted.

"Um...Harry, I don't think he's ever going to hear you or me at all. watch," Hally replied then waved her hand in front of the wizards face. Nothing happened.

The wizard then folded up the letter with a sigh, stood up, walked past Harry and Hally without glancing at them, and went to draw the curtains at his window.

The sky outside the window was ruby-red; it seemed to be sunset. the wizard went back to the desk, sat down, and twiddled his thumbs, watching the door.

The twins looked around the office. No Fawkes the phoenix--no whirring silver contraptions. This was Hogwarts as Riddle had known it, meaning that this unknown wizard was Headmaster, not Dumbledore, and they, Harry and Hally both, was little more than phantoms, completely invisible to the people of fifty years ago.

There was a knock on the office door.

"Enter," said the old wizard in a feeble voice.

A boy of about sixteen entered, taking off his pointed hat. A silver prefect's badge was glinting on his chest. He was much taller than Harry, but he, too, had raven dark hair.

"Ah, Riddle," said the Headmaster.

"You wanted to see me, Professor Dippet?" Riddle asked. He looked nervous.

"Sit down," said Dippet. "I've just been reading the letter you sent me."

"Oh," said Riddle. He sat down, gripping his hands together very tightly.

"My dear boy," said Dippet kindly. "I cannot possibly let you stay at school over the summer. Surely you want to go home for the holidays?"

"No," said Riddle at once. "I'd much rather stay at Hogwarts than go back to that--to that--"

"You live in a Muggle-orphanage during the holidays, I believe?" said Dippet curiously.

"Yes, sir," said Riddle, reddening slightly.

"You are Muggle-born?"

"Half-blood sir," said Riddle. "Muggle father, witch mother."

"And both your parents--?"

"My mother died just after I was born, sir. They told me at the orphanage she lived just long enough to name me--Tom after my father, Marvolo after my grandfather."

Dippet clucked his tongue sympathetically.

"The thing is Tom," he sighed. "Special arrangements might have been made for you, but in the current circumstances..."

"You mean all these attacks, sir?" said Riddle, and Harry's and Hally's hearts leapt at once, and they moved closer, scared of missing anything.

"Precisely," said the headmaster. "My dear boy, you must see how foolish it would be of me to allow you to remain at the castle when term ends. Particularly in light of the recent tragedy...the death of that poor little girl...you will be safer at your orphanage. As a matter of fact, the Ministry of Magic is even now talking about closing the school. We are no nearer locating the--er--source of all this unpleasantness..."

Riddle's eyes had widened.

"Sir--if the person was caught--if it all stopped--"

"What do you mean?" said Dippet with a squeak in his voice, sitting up in his chair. "Riddle, do you mean you know something about these attacks?"

"No, sir," said Riddle quickly.

But Harry and Hally both was sure it was the same sort of "no" that they theirselves had given Dumbledore.

Dippet sank back, looking faintly disappointed.

"You may go, Tom..."

Riddle slid off his chair and slouched out of the room. Harry and Hally both followed him.

Down the moving spiral staircase they went, emerging next to the gargoyle in the darkening corridor. Riddle stopped, and so did Harry and Hally, watching him. Both twins could tell that Riddle was doing some serious thinking. He was biting his lip, his forehead furrowed.

Then, as though he had suddenly reached a decision, he hurried off, Harry and Hally gliding noiselessly behind him. They didn't see another person until they reached the entrance hall, when a tall wizard with long, sweeping auburn hair and beard called to Riddle from the marble staircase.

"What are you doing, wandering around this late, Tom?"

The twins gaped at the wizard. He was none other than a fifty-year-younger Dumbledore.

"I had to see the headmaster, sir," said Riddle.

"Well, hurry off to bed," said Dumbledore, giving Riddle exactly the kind of penetrating stare both Harry and Hally knew so well. "Best not to roam the corridors these days. Not since..."

He sighed heavily, bade Riddle good night, and strode off. Riddle watched him walk out of sight and then, moving quickly, headed straight down the stone steps to the dungeons, with Harry and Hally in hot pursuit.

But to the twins' disappointment, Riddle led them not into a hidden passageway or a secret tunnel but to the very dungeons in which the twins had Potions with their father Severus Snape. The torches hadn't been lit, and when Riddle pushed the door almost closed, Harry and Hally both could only just see him, standing stock-still by the door, watching the passage outside.

It felt to the twins that they were there for at least an hour. All they could see was the figure of Riddle at the door, staring through the crack, waiting like a statue. And just when Harry and Hally stopped feeling expectant and tense and started wishing they could return to the present, they heard something more beyond the door.

Someone was creeping along the passage. They heard whoever it was pass the dungeon where they and Riddle were hidden. Riddle, quiet as a shadow, edged through the door and followed, Harry and Hally tip-toeing behind him, forgetting that they couldn't be heard.

For perhaps five minutes they followed the footsteps, until Riddle stopped suddenly, his head inclined in the direction of new noises. Harry and Hally heard a door creak open, and then someone speaking in a hoarse whisper.

"C'mon...gotta get yeh outta her...C'mon now...in the box..."

There was something familiar about the voice...

Riddle suddenly jumped around the corner. The twins stepped out behind him. They could see the dark outline of a huge boy who was crouching in front of an open door, a very large box next to it.

"Evening Rubeus," said Riddle sharply.

The boy slammed the door shut and stood up.

"What yer doin' down here Tom?"

Riddle stepped closer.

"It's all over," he said, "I'm going to have to turn you in, Rubeus. They're talking about closing Hogwarts if the attacks don't stop."

"What d'yeh--"

"I don't think you meant to kill anyone. But monsters don't make good pets. I suppose you just let it out for exercise and--"

"It never killed no one!" said the large boy, backing against the closed door. From behind him, the twins could hear a funny rustling and clicking.

"Come on, Rubeus," said Riddle, moving yet closer. "The dead girl's parents will be here tomorrow. The least Hogwarts can do is make sure that the thing that killed their daughter is slaughtered..."

"It wasn't him!" roared the boy, his voice echoing in the dark passage. "He wouldn't! He never!"

"Stand aside," said Riddle, drawing out his wand.

His spell lit the corridor with a sudden flaming light. The door behind the large boy flew open with such force it knocked him into the wall opposite. And out of it came something that made Harry and Hally let out a long, piercing scream unheard by anyone--

A vast, low-slung, hairy body and a tangle of black legs; a gleam of many eyes and a pair of razor-sharp pincers--Riddle raised his wand again, but he was too late. The thing bowled him over as it scuttled away, tearing up the corridor and out of sight. Riddle scrambled to his feet, looking after it; he raised his wand, but the huge boy leapt on him, seized his wand, and threw him back down, yelling, "NOOOOOOOO!"

The scene whirled, the darkness became complete; Harry and Hally felt themselves falling and , with a crash, they landed spread-eagled on Harry's four-poster in the Gryffindor dormitory, Riddle's diary lying open on Harry's stomach.

Before they had had time to regain their breath, the dormitory door opened and Ron came in.

"There you are...Why is Hally here?" he asked

They both sat up. They were both sweating and shaking.

"Hey, what's up you two?" Ron asked, looking at them in concern.

"It was Hagrid, Ron. Hagrid opened the Chamber of Secrets fifty years ago."

A/N: That is all for chapter 24. see you in chapter 25 bye for now.

Chapter 25 Cornelius Fudge & Malfoy and the attack of the Possum Bulb

Harry, Hally, Blaise, Ron and Hermione had always known that Hagrid had an unfortunate liking for large and monstrous creatures...Hally in particular. During their first year at Hogwarts he had tried to raise a dragon before the twins received their own luck dragon hatchlings in his little wooden house, and it would be a long time before they forgot the giant, three-headed dog he'd christened "Fluffy." And if, as a boy, Hagrid had heard that a monster was hidden somewhere in the castle, Harry and Hally both was sure he'd have gone to any lengths for a glimpse of it. He'd probably thought it was a shame that the monster had been cooped up so long, and thought it deserved the chance to stretch its many legs; Harry and Hally could just imagine the thirteen-year-old Hagrid trying to fit a leash and collar on it. But they was equally certain that Hagrid would never have meant to kill anybody.

The twins wished they hadn't found out how to work Riddle's diary. Again and again Ron, Blaise, and Hermione made them recount what they had seen, until they was heartily sick of telling them and sick of the long, circular conversation that followed.

"Riddle might have got the wrong person," said Hermione. "Maybe it was some other monster that was attacking people...."

"How many monsters d'you think this place can hold?" Ron asked dully.

"We always knew Hagrid had been expelled," Harry and Hally stated miserably. "And the attacks must've stopped after Hagrid was kicked out. Otherwise, Riddle wouldn't have got his award."

Ron tried a different tack.

"Riddle does sound like Percy—who asked him to squeal on Hagrid anyway?"

"But the monster had killed someone Ron," said Hermione.

“And Riddle was going to go back to some Muggle orphanage if they closed Hogwarts,” Said Harry.

“I don’t blame him for wanting to stay here....” Hally added, her voice trailing off

“You two met Hagrid down Knockturn Alley, didn’t you Harry?”

“He was buying Flesh-Eating Slug Repellent,” said Harry.

“And he was carrying it when we met up with him,” said Hally.

The five of them fell silent. After a long pause, Hermione voiced the knottiest question of all in a hesitant voice.

“Do you think we should go and ask Hagrid about it all?”

“That’d be a cheerful visit,” said Ron. “Hello, Hagrid. Tell us, have you been setting anything mad and hairy loose in the castle lately?”

It could not be helped at that moment when they heard Ron’s remark. Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Hermione had all bursted into laughter.

In the end however, they decided that they would not say anything to Hagrid unless there was another attack, and as more and more days went by with no whisper from the disembodied voice, they became hopeful that they would never need to talk to him about why he had been expelled. It was now nearly four months since Justin and Nearly Headless Nick had been petrified, and nearly everybody seemed to think that the attacker or attackers, whoever they were, had retired for good. Peeves had finally got bored of his “Oh, Potters, you rotters” song, Ernie Macmillan asked Harry and Hally both quite politely to pass a bucket of leaping toadstools in Herbology one day, and in March several Mandrakes threw a loud and raucous party in greenhouse three. This made Professor Sprout very happy.

“The moment they start trying to move into each other’s pots, we’ll know they’re fully mature,” she told Harry and Hally, who already knew that information. “Then we’ll be able to revive those poor people

in the hospital wing. Until then, Hally get ready. You'll be demonstrating on how to transplant Possum Bulbs."

Hally smiled with her eyes dancing with excited anticipation while Harry gave her a wary glance.

"Uh, Possum Bulbs?" He asked Professor Sprout

"You heard correctly Mr. Potter...perhaps we'll have you help with the demonstration since your sister will be needing two pairs of helping hands." Professor Sprout suggested as she led them into the greenhouse to begin the day's lesson.

Soon the classes were full with the usual students with an exception...both Ravenclaw house and Slytherin house second years were also present since they all were given special notices to attend the Herbology class with the Hufflepuff and Gryffindor students. They all gathered on all sides of the tables, cramping each other's space until Professor Sprout got their attention.

"Good morning students," Professor Sprout greeted them in a loud and clear voice

"Good morning Professor," the students all chorused at once.

"Today is a special day, and since the Ravenclaws and the Slytherins has join our classroom for today, we will be learning to transplant Possum Bulbs." Professor Sprout announced

Every student except for Hally looked confused. "Miss. Potter will be showing us a demonstration on the proper way to transplant them along with the help of Mr. Potter, and one more helper here....Mr. Malfoy," Professor Sprout announced, beckoning the three forward to where she stood.

Harry, Hally, and a reluctant Draco Malfoy headed toward Professor Sprout. They stood with Hally standing in-between both her brother and Draco, who was glaring at one another with the looks of kill on their faces.

“Now boys, Miss. Potter will need both of your assistance since these plants are highly temperamental, so let us both contain ourselves.” Professor Sprout told both Harry and Draco while Hally took a firm hold of the sapling that sat in front of her.

“Mr. Potter, Mr. Malfoy please grasp the sapling firmly just as Miss. Potter is doing and on three, you all must pull up together. One...two...three pull!” Professor Sprout spoke out after Harry and Draco each took a firm hold of the sapling next.

Their hands shook as they seen the sapling struggle hard, then heard a strange chucking sound coming from it. Hally quickly grabbed a bigger pot, setting it under the sapling.

“Now then, firmly place the sapling into the pot...very good,” Professor Sprout commented proudly as she watched Hally cover the sapling up with fresh soil and fertilizer.

“Well, done. Ten points each to Gryffindor and Slytherin for a job well done.” Professor Sprout announced as the three headed back to their place at the table.

“That was cool Hal, even if Malfoy had to help,” Harry whispered to his sister grinning before listening to Professor Sprout once more.

“All right now class. Three to a station this time, and remember to use teamwork on this project. I will be back shortly.” Professor Sprout announced before stepping out of the greenhouse.

The students started to work on their projects, whispering to one another.

“These things looks worse than the Mandrakes,” Ron said, making a face at the sapling. The sapling suddenly spitted soil out of its mouth at Ron.

The twins started sniggering along with Blaise and Hermione. “Oh shut up,” Ron moaned before someone started speaking about a different topic.

“So Hally, enquiring minds want to know....when are you and Cedric going to out on a date this year?” several girls asked giggling

“Don’t have time to this year,” Hally answered, keeping her concentration as she reached for a bigger pot until she heard Draco Malfoy make a sneering remark.

“Yeah, especially when Diggory could be the next target out there...oh wait, unless he got tired of little Potter here and went for someone else perhaps?” Draco sneered out

“Shut up Malfoy!” Harry seethed in anger

“No. I know what let’s fix your little sister up with someone else here Potter. How about Finnegan? The Irish region sound fascinating if you could dance their steps, or how about Longbottom? Heh, she’ll scream in pain with that lard on top of her,” Draco continued with his sneering while Hally started to fume in anger quietly, and also started to plot out her revenge.

Harry went to stalk around the table after Draco. “That’s it Malfoy....”

“Let him go Harry. You’re better than he is. You don’t need the trouble,” Hally intervened.

Harry looked at her with wide eyes until he figured out what she meant, grinning secretly and waiting for the moment.

Draco looked at her in surprise. “Heh, come on little Potter, do something to defend yourself at least here.” He replied

Hally raised her eyes up at him while she took hold of the Possum Bulb in front of her. “All right I will. Here Malfoy CATCH!” she yelled out, throwing the Possum Bulb at him swiftly.

The next thing everyone knew, Draco caught the sapling, but lost control of handling the plant when it leaped onto him, shredding his robes, and school uniform.

“HELP! GET IT OFF!” Draco wailed out

The students roared into hysterical laughter, watching Draco in a wrestling match with the sapling.

"Threw a Possum Bulb At Mr. Malfoy! When are you going to learn that violence is not the way to take care of things Raven!" Severus demanded his question an hour later inside his office while Draco glared at the raven-red-streak-haired girl.

"I don't know what to say dad, except that I'm sorry Malfoy," Hally spoke out giving Draco a shock

"I'm sorry that it didn't chew off your face!" Hally spat out next

"Enough Raven....and don't think that I don't know about the comments you made young man! You're just as guilty as Raven here and you'll both be serving detention with me Tonight! Understand?" Severus questioned

"Yes dad," Hally answered him

"Yes Professor," Draco sighed in defeat

Severus allowed them to leave his office. "Found that funny...."

"Do me a favor Malfoy and keep your trap shut if you want to stay alive for the remainder of the year," Hally warned walking away from him

That evening they served their detention with Severus rearranging the Potions cupboard for at least two hours in silence.

The second years were given something to think about during their Easter Holidays. The time had come to choose their subjects for the third year, a matter that Hally and Hermione, at least, took very seriously.

"It could affect our whole future," both girls told Harry and Ron as they pored over lists of new subjects, marking them with checks.

"I just want to give up Potions," Said Harry, teasing his twin sister big time.

"You do and I will get you good Harry James...Harry! You stop that teasing! You know dad won't allow us to drop his subject," Hally giggled after realizing Harry's harmless joke.

Harry sniggered at her.

"Well I can't," Ron said gloomily. "We keep all our old subjects, or I'd've ditched Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"But that's very important!" said Hermione, shocked.

"Not the way Lockhart teaches it," said Ron. "I haven't learned anything from him except not to set pixies loose."

"We agree with Ron on that one," both twins blurted out, remembering that day very well.

Neville Longbottom had been sent letters from all the witches and wizards in his family, all giving him different advice on what to choose. Confused and worried, he sat reading the subject lists with his tongue poking out, asking people whether they thought Arithmancy sounded more difficult than the study of Ancient Runes. Dean Thomas, who, like Harry had grown up with Muggles, ended up closing his eyes and jabbing his wand at the list, then picking the subjects it landed on. Hermione took nobody's advice but signed up for everything. Hally however, with the close eye from her brother Harry, focused on what subjects popped into her head, and chose them wisely.

"Wait Hal! Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, and Astronomy?" Harry asked in bewilderment

"yeah Harry why?" Hally asked him quietly

"You usually don't...you've been having visions again haven't you Hal?" Harry asked in a whisper.

Hally could only nod at him. "Well, I could take Divination with you..."

"I've already been put in the advanced class for next year Harry. Professor Trelawney had already discussed it with dad and Professor Dumbledore, they both agreed and that's a first for anything between those two." Hally explained quietly

"Oh. Then I guess I could take Arithmancy and Astronomy with you...that is if you want some company," Harry offered with a grin

Hally gave him a smile, "Thanks big brother. I'm never tired with your company," Hally accepted

Harry smiled back at his sisters answer. If he stayed with the Dursley's or if their Aunt Petunia stayed with their Uncle Vernon, he would never had been able to talk wizardry with them. Not with them he wouldn't have the guidance: Percy Weasley was eager to share his experience with all of them.

"Depends where you want to go," Percy said. "It's never too early to think about the future, so I'd recommended Divination. People say Muggle Studies is a soft option, but I personally think Wizards should have a thorough of the non-magical community, particularly if they're thinking of working in close contact with them--look my father, he had to deal with Muggle business all the time. My brother Charlie was always more of an outdorr type, so he went for Care of Magical Creatures. Play to your strengths you two."

But the only thing Harry and Hally really felt good at was Quidditch, Potions, and Charms. In the end, Harry chose two subjects that were same to Hally's, and keeping his promise to Ron chose the same subjects as him, feeling that if he was lousy at them, at least he'd have someone friendly to help him. Hally had done the same in favor of Harry asking her to.

Gryffindor's next Quidditch match would be against Hufflepuff. Wood was insisting on team practices every night after dinner, so that Harry nor Hally barely had time for anything but Quidditch and homework. However, the training sessions were getting better, or at least drier, and the evening before Saturday's match they went up to Harry's dormitory to drop off Harry's broomstick after dropping Hally's off

inside her dorm feeling Gryffindor's chances for the Quidditch cup had never been better.

But their cheerful mood didn't last long. At the top of the stairs leading to the boys dorms, they met Neville Longbottom, who was looking frantic.

"Harry, Hally--I don't know who did it--I just found out--"

Watching Harry and Hally fearfully, Neville pushed open the door.

The contents of Harry's trunk had been thrown everywhere. His cloak lay ripped on the floor. The bedclothes had been pulled off his four-poster and the drawer had been pulled out of his bedside cabinet, the contents strewn over the mattress.

Harry walked over to the bed, open-mouthed, treading on a few loose pages of Travels with Trolls. As he, Hally and Nevill pulled the blankets back onto his bed, Ron, Dean, and Seamus came in. Dean swore loudly.

"What happened Harry?"

"No idea," said Harry. But Ron was examining Harry's robes. All the pockets were hanging out.

"Someone's been looking for something," said Ron. "Is there anything missing?"

Harry started to pick up all his things with Hally's help and throw them into his trunk. It was only as he threw the last of Lockhart books back into it that he realized what wasn't there.

"Riddle's diary's gone," he said in an undertone to Ron and Hally both.

"What?"

Harry jerked his head toward the dormitory door and Ron and Hally followed him out. They hurried down to the Gryffindor common room,

which was half-empty; and joined Hermione, who was sitting alone, reading a book called Ancient Runes made easy.

Hermione looked aghast at the news.

"But--only a Gryffindor could have stolen--nobody else knows our password--"

"Exactly," said Harry and Hally both.

They woke the next day to brilliant sunshine and a light, refreshing breeze.

"Perfect Quidditch conditions!" said Wood enthusiastically at the Gryffindor table, loading the team's plates with scrambled eggs. "Harry, Hally buck up there you two. you both need a decent breakfast."

Both twins had been staring down the packed Gryffindor table, wondering if the new owner of Riddle's diary was right in front of their eyes. Hermione had been urging them to report the robbery, but they didn't like the idea. They'd have to tell a teacher all about the diary, and how many people knew why Hagrid had been expelled fifty years ago? They didn't want to be the ones who brought it all up again.

As they left the Great Hall with Ron and Hermione to go and collect their Quidditch things, another very serious worry was added to Harry and Hally's growing lists. They had just set foot on the marble staircase when they heard it yet again--

"Kill this time...let me rip...tear..."

They shouted aloud and Ron and Hermione both jumped away from them in alarm.

"The voice!" the twins said, looking over their shoulders. "We just heard it again--didn't you two?"

Ron shook his head, wide-eyed. Hermione, however, clapped a hand to her forehead.

"Harry, Hally--I think I've just understood something! I've got to go to the library!"

And she sprinted away, up the stairs.

"What does she understand?" Said the twins distractedly, still looking around, trying to tell where the voice had come from.

"Loads more than I do," said Ron, shaking his head.

"But why's she got to go to the library?"

"Because that's what Hermione does," said Ron, shrugging. "When in doubt, go to the library."

Harry and Hally stood, irresolute, trying to catch the voice again, but people were now emerging from the Great Hall behind them, talking loudly, exiting through the front doors on their way to the Quidditch pitch.

"You two better get going" said Ron. "It's nearly eleven--the match--"

The twins raced up to Gryffindor Tower, collected their Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones, and joined the large crowd swarming across the grounds, but their minds was stil in the castle along with the bodiless voice, and as they pulled on their scarlet robes in the locker room, their only comfort was that everyone was now outside to watch the game.

The teams walked onto the field t tumultuous applause. Oliver Wood took off for a warm-up flight around the goal posts; Madam Hooch released the balls. The Hufflpuffs, who played in canary yellow, were standing in a huddle, having a last-minute discussion of tactics.

Harry and Hally was just mounting their brooms when Professor McGonagall came half marching, half running across the pitch, carrying an enormous purple megaphone.

The twins' hearts dropped like a stone.

"This match has been canceled," Professor McGonagall called through the megaphone, addressing the packed stadium. There were boos and shouts. Oliver Wood, looking devastated, landed and ran toward Professor McGonagall without getting off his broomstick.

"But Professor!" he shouted. "We've got to play--the cup--Gryffindor--"

Professor McGonagall ignored him and continued to shout through her megaphone.

"All students are to make their way back to their House common rooms, where their Heads of Houses will give them further information. As quickly as you can, please!"

Then she lowered her megaphone and beckoned both Harry and Hally over to her.

"Potters, I think you two better come with me..."

Wondering how she could possibly suspect them this time, Harry and Hally both saw Ron detach himself from the complaining crowd; he came running up to them as they set off toward the castle. Blaise noticed as well running to join them. To the twin's surprise, Professor McGonagall didn't object.

"Yes, perhaps you two better come, too, Weasley, Zabini..."

Some of the students swarming around them were grumbling about the match being canceled; others looked worried. Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Ron followed Professor McGonagall back into the school and up the marble staircase. But they weren't taken to anybody's office this time.

"This will be a bit of a shock," said Professor McGonagall in a surprisingly gentle voice as they approached the infirmary. "There has been another attack...another double attack."

Harry and Hally's insides did a horrible somersault. Professor McGonagall pushed the door open and they, Ron and Blaise entered.

Madam Pomfrey was bending over a fifth-year girl with long, curly hair. Harry recognized her as a Ravenclaw he and Ron accidentally asked for directions to the Slytherin common room. And on the bed next to her was--

"Hermione!" Ron groaned.

Hermione lay utterly still, her eyes open and glassy.

"They were found near the library," said Professor McGonagall. "I don't suppose either one of you four can explain this? It was on the floor next to them..."

She was holding up a small, circular mirror.

Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Ron shook their heads, staring at Hermione.

"I will escort you three back to Gryffindor Tower, and Professor Snape will escort Miss Zabini back to Slytherin," said Professor McGonagall heavily. "I need to address the students in any case."

"All students will return to their House common rooms by six o'clock in the evening. No student is to leave the dormitories after that time. You will be escorted to each lesson by a teacher. No student is to use the bathroom unaccompanied by a teacher. All further Quidditch training and matches are to be postponed. There will be no more evening activities."

The Gryffindors packed inside the common room listened to Professor McGonagall in silence. She rolled up the parchment from which she had been reading and said in a somewhat choked voice, "I need hardly add that I have rarely been so distressed. It is likely that the school will be closed unless the culprit behind these attacks is caught. I would urge anyone who thinks they might know anything about them come forward."

She climbed somewhat awkwardly out of the portrait hole, and the Gryffindors began talking immediately.

"That's two Gryffindors down, not counting a Gryffindor ghost, one Ravenclaw, and one Hufflepuff," said the Weasley twins' friend Lee Jordan, counting on his fingers. "haven't any of the teachers noticed that the Slytherins are all safe? Isn't it obvious all this stuff's coming from Slytherin? The heir of Slytherin, the monster of Slytherin--why don't they chuck all the Slytherins out?" he roared, to nods and scattered applause.

Percy Weasley was sitting in a chair behind Lee, but for once he didn't seem keen to make his views heard. He was looking pale and stunned.

"Percy's in shock," George told Harry and Hally quietly. "That Ravenclaw girl--Penelope Clearwater--she's a prefect. I don't think he thought the monster would dare attack a prefect."

But the twin's were only half-listening. They didn't seem to be able to get rid of the picture of Hermione, lying on the hospital bed as though carved out of stone. And if the culprit wasn't caught soon, they was going to go back home by their father's orders and be kept a close eye on by the family house-elves. Tom Riddle had turned Hagrid in because he was faced with the prospect of a Muggle orphanage if the school closed. The twins now knew exactly how he had felt.

"What're we going to do?" said Ron quietly to the twins. "D'you think they suspect Hagrid?"

"We've got to go and talk to him," said Harry, making up his mind. "I can't believe it's him this time. But if he set the monster loose last time he'll know how to get inside the Chamber of Secrets, and that's a start."

Hally nodded in agreement with Harry.

"But McGonagall said we've got to stay in our tower unless we're in class--"

"I think," said Harry, more quietly still, "It's time to get our dad's old cloak out again."

"I'll get mum's ring," Hally whispered, knowing that Blaise will be joining them and it would be crowded inside Harry's cloak.

The twins had inherited just one thing each from their parents: a long and silvery Invisibility Cloak and a jeweled Invisibility Ring. It was their only chance of sneaking out of the school to visit Hagrid without anyone knowing about it. They went to bed at the usual time, waited until Neville, Dean, and Seamus had stopped discussing the Chamber of Secrets and finally fallen asleep, then got up, dressed again, met up with each other, with Hally slipping on the ring and Harry throwing the cloak over themselves.

They headed out of the common room into the darkened Gryffindor hall to their destination, but stopping just at the staircase leading down to the Slytherin common, waiting until they seen Blaise sneak up the staircase.

"Blaise, under here," Harry whispered out to her, showing her where he was. Blaise quickly slipped under the cloak.

"Where's Hally..." "Here Blaise," Hally whispered as they made their way to where they were headed.

The journey through the dark and deserted castle corridors wasn't enjoyable. The twins who had wandered the castle at night several times before, had never seen it so crowded after sunset. Teachers, prefects, and ghosts were marching the corridors in pairs, staring around for any unusual activity. Their Invisibilty Cloak and ring didn't stop them making any noise, and there was a particularly tense moment when Ron stubbed his toe only yards from the spot where Severus Snape stood standing guard. Thankfully, Severus sneezed at almost exactly the moment Ron swore. It was with relief that they reached the oak front doors and eased them open.

It was a clear, starry night. They hurried toward the lit windows of Hagrid's house and pulled off the cloak while Hally slipped off her ring, tucking it safely away inside her pocket when they were right outside his front door.

Seconds after they had knocked, Hagrid flung it open. They found themselves face-to-face with him aiming a crossbow at them. Fang the boarhound barked loudly behind him.

"Oh," he said, lowering the weapon and staring at them. "What're you four doin' here?"

"What's that for?" said Harry and Hally, both pointing at the crossbow as they stepped inside.

"Nothin'--nothin'--" Hagrid muttered. "I've bin expectin'--doesn't matter--Sit down--I'll make tea--"

He hardly seemed to know what he was doing. He nearly extinguished the fire, spilling water from the kettle on it, and then smashed the teapot with a nervous jerk of his massive hand.

"Are you okay Hagrid?" said Harry and Hally at once. "Did you hear about Hermione?"

"Oh, I heard, all righ'," said Hagrid, a slight break in his voice.

He kept glancing nervously at the windows. He poured them each large mugs of boiling water (he forgotten to add tea bags) and was just putting a slab of fruitcake on a plate when there was a loud knock on the door.

Hagrid dropped the fruitcake. Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Ron exchanged panic-stricken looks, then threw the Invisibility Cloak over him Ron and Blaise, while Hally quickly took out her ring slipping it on her finger once more. they all retreated into a corner. Hagrid checked that they were hidden, seized his crossbow, and flung open his door once more.

"Good evening, Hagrid."

It was Dumbledore. He entered, looking deadly serious, and was followed by a second, very odd-looking man.

The stranger had rumpled gray hair and an anxious expression, and was wearing a strange mixture of clothes: a pinstripe suit, a scarlet tie, a long black cloak, and pointed purple boots. Under his arm he carried a lime-green bowler.

"That's Dad's boss!" Ron breathed. "Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic!"

Harry elbowed Ron hard to make him shut up.

Hagrid had gone pale and sweaty. He dropped into one of his chairs and looked from Dumbledore to Cornelius Fudge.

"Bad business, Hagrid," said Fudge in rather clipped tones. "Very bad business. Had to come. Four attacks on Muggle-borns. Things've gone far enough. Ministry's got to act."

"I never," said Hagrid, looking imploringly at Dumbledore. "You know I never, Professor Dumbledore, sir--"

"I want it understood, Cornelius, that Hagrid had my full confidence," said Dumbledore, frowning at Fudge.

"Look, Albus," said Fudge, uncomfortably. "Hagrid's record's against him. Ministry's got to do something--the school governors have been in touch--"

"Yet again, Cornelius, I tell you that taking Hagrid away will not help in the slightest," said Dumbledore. His blue eyes were full of fire. Harry and Hagrid had never seen before.

"Look at it from my point of view," said Fudge, fidgeting with his bowler. "I'm under a lot of pressure. Got to be seen to be doing something. If it turns out it wasn't Hagrid, he'll be back and no more said. But I've got to take him. Got to. Wouldn't be doing my duty--"

"Take me?" said Hagrid, who was trembling. "Take me where?"

"For a short stretch only," said Fudge, not meeting Hagrid's eyes. "Not a punishment, Hagrid, more a precaution. If someone else is caught, you'll be let out with a full apology--"

"Not Azkaban?" croaked Hagrid.

Before Fudge could answer, there was another loud rap on the door.

Dumbledore answered it. It was Harry's turn for an elbow in the ribs; he'd let out an audible gasp. Hally quickly covered her mouth in order to remain silent.

Mr. Lucius Malfoy strode into Hagrid's hut, swathed in a long black traveling cloak, smiling a cold and satisfied smile. Fang started to growl.

"Already here Fudge," he said approvingly. "Good, good..."

"What're you doin' here?" said Hagrid furiously. "Get outta my house!"

"My dear man, please believe me, I have no pleasure at all in being inside your--er--d'you call this a house?" said Lucius Malfoy, sneering as he looked around the small cabin. "I simply called at the school and was told that the headmaster was here."

"And what exactly did you want with me, Lucius?" said Dumbledore. He spoke politely, but the fire was still blazing in his blue eyes.

"Dreadful thing, Dumbledore," said Malfoy lazily, taking out a long roll of parchment, "but the governors feel it's time for you to step aside. This is an Order of Suspension--you'll find all twelve signatures on it. I'm afraid we feel you're losing your touch. How many attacks have there been now? Two more this afternoon, wasn't it? At this rate, there'll be no Muggle-borns left at Hogwarts, and we all know what an awful loss that would be to the school."

"Oh, now, see here, Lucius," said Fudge, looking alarmed, "Dumbledore suspended--no, no--last thing we want just now--"

"The appointment--or suspension--of the headmaster is a matter for the governors, Fudge," said Mr. Malfoy smoothly. "And as Dumbledore has failed to stop these attacks--"

"See here, Malfoy, if Dumbledore can't stop them," said Fudge, whose upper lip was sweating now, "I mean to say, who can?"

"That remains to be seen," said Mr. Malfoy with a nasty smile. "But as all twelve of us have voted--"

Hagrid leapt to his feet, his shaggy black head grazing the ceiling.

"An' how many did yeh have ter threaten an' blackmail before they agreed, Malfoy, eh?" he roared.

"Dear, dear, you know, that temper of yours will lead you into trouble one of these days, Hagrid," said Mr. Malfoy. "I would advise you not to shout at the Azkaban guards like that. They won't like it at all."

"Yeh can' take Dumbledore!" yelled Hagrid, making Fang the boarhound cower and whimper in his basket. "Take him away, an' the Muggle-borns won' stand a chance! There'll be killin' next!"

"Calm yourself, Hagrid," said Dumbledore sharply. He looked at Lucius Malfoy.

"If the governors want my removal, Lucius I shall of course step aside--"

"But--" stuttered Fudge.

"No!" growled Hagrid.

Dumbledore had not taken his bright blue eyes off Lucius Malfoy's cold gray ones.

"However," said Dumbledore, speaking very slowly, and clearly so that none of them could miss a word, "You will find that I will only truly have left the school when none here are loyal to me. You will also

find that help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it."

For a second, Harry and Hally was almost sure Dumbledore's eyes flickered toward the corner where they, Ron and Blaise stood hidden.

"Admirable sentiments," said Malfoy, bowing. "We shall all miss your--er--highly individual way of running things, Albus, and only hope that your successor will manage to prevent any--ah--killins."

He strode to the cabin door, opened it, and bowed Dumbledore out. Fudge, fiddling with his bowler, waited for Hagrid to go ahead of him, but Hagrid stood his ground, took a deep breath, and said carefully, "If anyone wanted ter find out some stuff, all they'd have ter do would be ter follow the spiders. That'd lead 'em right! That's all I'm sayin'."

Fudge stared at him in amazement.

"All right, I'm comin'," said Hagrid, pulling on his moleskin overcoat, But as he was about to follow Fudge through the door, he stopped again and said loudly, "An' someone'll need ter feed Fang while I'm away."

The door banged shut and Ron pulled off the Invisibility Cloak.

"We're in trouble now," he said hoarsely. "No Dumbledore. They might as well close the school tonight. There'll be an attack a day with him gone.

Fang started howling, scratching at the closed door.

A/N: that is all for chapter 25. see you in chapter 26 bye for now.

Chapter 26 ARAGOG

Summer was creeping over the grounds around the castle; sky and lake alike turned periwinkle blue and flowers large as cabbages burst into bloom in the greenhouses. But with no Hagrid visible from the castle windows, striding the grounds with Fang at his heels, the scene didn't look right to the twins; no better, in fact, than the inside of the castle, where things were so horribly wrong.

Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Ron had tried to visit Hermione, but visitors were now barred from the hospital wing.

"We're taking not more chances," Madam Pomfrey told them severely through a crack in the infirmary door. "No, I'm sorry, there's every chance the attacker might come back to finish these people off..."

With Dumbledore gone, fear had spread as never before, so that the sun warming the castle walls outside seemed to stop at the mullioned windows. There was barely a face to be seen in the school that didn't look worried and tense, and any laughter that rang through the corridors sounded shrill and unnatural and was quickly stilled.

Harry and Hally both constantly repeated Dumbledore's final words to themselves.

"I will only truly have left this school when none here are loyal to me...Help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it." But what good were these words? Who exactly were they supposed to ask for help, when everyone was just as confused and scared as they were?

Hagrid's hint about the spiders was far easier to understand—the trouble was, there didn't seem to be a single spider left in the castle to follow. The twins looked everywhere they went, helped (rather reluctantly) by Ron. They were hampered, of course, by the fact that they weren't allowed to wander off on their own but had to move around the castle in a pack with the other Gryffindors. Most of their fellow students seemed glad that they were being shepherded from class to class by teachers, but Harry and Hally both found it very irksome.

One person, however, seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the atmosphere of terror and suspicion. Draco Malfoy was strutting around the school as though he had just been appointed Head Boy. The twins didn't realized what he was so pleased about until the Potions lesson about two weeks after Dumbledore and Hagrid had left, when, sitting right behind Malfoy, Harry and Hally both overheard him gloating to Crabbe and Goyle.

"I always thought Father might be the one who got rid of Dumbledore," he said, not troubling to keep his voice down. "I told you he thinks Dumbledore's the worst headmaster the school's ever had. Maybe we'll get a decent headmaster now. Someone who won't want the Chamber of Secrets closed. McGonagall won't last long, she's only filling in...."

Severus Snape swept past Harry and Hally, making no comment about Hermione's empty seat and cauldron in his usual grumpy showing of appearance to his house.

"Sir," said Malfoy loudly. "Sir, why don't you apply for the headmaster's job?"

"Now, now, Malfoy," said Severus, though he had to express a thin-lipped smile. "Professor Dumbledore has only been suspended by the governors. I daresay he'll be back with us soon enough."

"Yeah, right," said Malfoy, smirking. "I expect you'd have Father's vote, sir, if you wanted to apply for the job—I'll tell Father you're the best teacher here, sir—"

Severus smirked as he swept off around the dungeon, fortunately not spotting Seamus Finnigan, who was pretending to vomit into his cauldron. Harry and Hally both had to give Seamus a stern look, making the boy stop before he was caught.

"I'm quite surprised the Mudbloods haven't all packed their bags by now," Malfoy went on. "Bet you five Galleons the next one dies. Pity it wasn't Granger—"

"You know Malfoy," Hally intervened loudly, being heard by the classroom and Severus, who hid a grin from being seen, "That I heard the purebloods were the next ones on the list. Ten Galleons says that you're the next target."

Draco Malfoy spun around, looking at Hally with glares. "But that's just a rumor that I had heard," she added with an evil grin. "Although it would be best to watch your back just in case."

The bell rang at that moment, which was lucky; at Hally's last words after hearing Malfoy's, Ron had leapt off his stool, and in the scramble to collect bags and books, his attempts to reach Malfoy went unnoticed.

"Let me at him," Ron growled as Harry, and Dean hung onto his arms and Hally grabbed hold of his robes from the back. "I don't care. I don't need my wand, I'm going to kill him with my bare hands..."

"Hurry up, I've got to take you all to Herbology," barked Severus over the class's heads, and off they marched, with Harry, Hally, Ron, and Dean bringing up the rear, Ron still trying to get loose. It was only safe to let go of him when Severus had seen them out of the castle and they were making their way across the vegetable patch toward the greenhouses.

The Herbology class was very subdued; there were now two missing from their number, Justin and Hermione.

Professor Sprout set them all to work pruning the Abyssinian Shrivelfigs. The twins went to tip an armful of withered stalks onto the compost heap and found themselves face-to-face with Ernie Macmillan. Ernie took a deep breath and said, very formally, "I just want to say, Harry, Hally, that I'm sorry I ever suspected you two. I know you two would never attack Hermione Granger, and I apologize for all the stuff I said. We're all in the same boat now, and, well..."

He held out a pudgy hand, and Harry and Hally shook it one at a time.

Ernie and his friend Hannah came to work at the same Shrivelfig as Harry, Hally, and Ron.

“That Draco Malfoy character,” said Ernie, breaking off dead wigs. “He seems very pleased about all this, doesn’t he? D’you know, I think he might be Slytherin’s heir.”

“That’s clever of you,” said Ron, who didn’t seem to have forgiven Ernie as readily as Harry and Hally.

“Do you think it’s Malfoy, Harry and Hally?” Ernie asked.

“No,” said Harry and Hally both, so firmly that Ernie and Hannah stared.

A second later, Harry and Hally spotted something.

Several large spiders were scuttling over the ground on the other side of the glass, moving in an unnaturally straight line as though taking the shortest route to a prearranged meeting. Both twins hit Ron over the hand with their pruning shears.

“Ouch! What’re you two...”

The twins pointed out the spiders, following their progress with their eyes screwed up against the sun.

“Oh, yeah,” said Ron, trying, and failing, to look pleased. “But we can’t follow them now...”

Ernie and Hannah were listening curiously.

The twins’ eyes narrowed as they focused on the spiders. If they pursued their fixed course, there could be no doubt about where they would end up.

“Looks like they’re heading for the Forbidden Forest....”

And Ron looked even unhappier about that.

At the end of the lesson Professor Sprout escorted the class to their Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson. Harry, Hally, and Ron lagged behind the others so they could talk out of earshot.

"We'll have to use the Invisibility Cloak and Ring again," Harry and Hally told Ron at once. "We can take Fang with us. He's used to going into the Forest with Hagrid, he might be some help."

"Right," said Ron, who was twirling his wand nervously in his fingers. "Er—aren't there—aren't there supposed to be werewolves in the forest?" he added as they took their usual places at the back of Lockhart's classroom.

Preferring not to answer that question, Harry said, "There are good things in there, too. The centaurs are all right, and the unicorns..."

"There's more good things in there than bad Ron, remember that," Hally replied interrupting her big brother Harry.

Ron had never been into the Forbidden Forest before. Harry and Hally both had entered it only once and had hoped never to do so again.

Lockhart bounded into the room and the class stared at him. Every other teacher in the place was looking grimmer than usual, but Lockhart appeared nothing sort of buoyant.

"Come now," he cried, beaming around him. "Why all these long faces?"

People swapped exasperated looks, but nobody answered.

"Don't you people realize," said Lockhart, speaking slowly, as though they were all a bit dim, "the danger has passed! The culprit has been taken away..."

"Says who?" said Dean Thomas loudly.

"My dear young man, the Minister of Magic wouldn't have taken Hagrid if he hadn't been one hundred percent sure that he was

guilty,” said Lockhart, in the tone of someone explaining that one and one made two.

“Oh, yes he would,” said Ron, even more loudly than Dean.

“I flatter myself I know a touch more about Hagrid’s arrest than you do, Mr. Weasley,” said Lockhart in a self-satisfied tone.

“You know more about Hagrid’s arrest than you do with Defense Against Dark Arts,” Hally blurted out her sneer at Lockhart

“There now you see? Even Miss. Potter agrees with me,” Lockhart said, not catching the sarcasm from Hally’s remark.

Ron started to say that he didn’t think so, somehow, but stopped in Midsentence when Harry kicked him hard under the desk.

“We weren’t there, remember?” Harry muttered.

But Lockhart’s disgusting cheeriness, his hints that he had always thought Hagrid was no good, his confidence that the whole business was now at an end, irritated Harry and Hally so much that they yearned to throw Gadding with Ghouls right in Lockhart’s stupid face. Instead they contented themselves with Harry scrawling a note to Ron: Let’s do it tonight.

Ron read the message, swallowed hard, and looked sideways at the empty seat usually filled by Hermione. The sight seemed to stiffen his resolve, and he nodded. After class Hally had a special note being delivered to Blaise by her pet luck dragon Silver who bounded happily down the steps and was immediately allowed into the Slytherin common room by the Slytherins who was very fond of him. He bounded right up to Blaise thumping his tail happily at her, and dropped the note into her lap. Blaise read the note quietly, then looked down at Silver.

“Tell them ok Silver,” Blaise whispered to the luck dragon then watched him bound away going past Draco.

“Hey, hello Silver o’boy...”

"Bye Boyy Toyy, in hurry," Silver greeted hastily bounding out of the common room.

Marcus Flint leaned against a wall watching the luck dragon go out. "Looks like Silver is being smart and staying away from you Malfoy," he commented before walking away while Draco watched the entrance closed behind Silver.

The Gryffindor common room was always very crowded these days, because from six o'clock onward the Gryffindors had nowhere to go. They also had plenty to talk about, with the result that the common room often didn't empty until past midnight.

Hally had waited while Harry went to get the Invisibility Cloak out of his trunk right after dinner, and spent the evening sitting on it, waiting for the room to clear. Fred and George challenged Harry and Ron to a few games of Exploding Snap, and Ginny sat beside Hally watching them, very subdued in Hermione's usual chair. Harry and Ron kept losing on purpose, trying to finish the games quickly, but even so, it was well past midnight when Fred, George, and Ginny finally went to bed.

Harry, Hally, and Ron waited for the distant sounds of two dormitory doors closing before seizing the cloak (Hally already had her ring in her pocket, taking it out and slipping it on her finger) while Harry and Ron threw the cloak over themselves, and climbing through the portrait hole.

They met up with Blaise at their usual meeting place, letting the brown-haired girl slip under the cloak with Harry and Ron before heading off on their mission.

It was another difficult journey through the castle, dodging all the teachers. At last they reached the entrance hall, slid back the lock on the oak front doors, squeezed between them, trying to stop any creaking, and stepped out into the moonlit grounds.

"Course," said Ron abruptly as they strode across the black grass, "we might get to the forest and find there's nothing to follow. Those

spiders might not've been going there at all. I know it looked like they were moving in that sort of general direction, but..."

His voice trailed away hopefully.

They reached Hagrid's house, sad and sorry-looking with its blank windows. When Harry pushed the door open, Fang went mad with joy at the sight of them. Worried he might wake everyone at the castle with his deep, booming barks, they hastily fed him treacle fudge from a tin on the mantelpiece, which glued his teeth together.

Harry left the Invisibility Cloak on Hagrid's table while Hally slipped her ring off her finger to put in her pocket for safe keeping. There would be no need for them in the pitch-dark forest.

"C'mon Fang, we're going for a walk," Harry and Hally said, each patting his legs, and Fang bounded happily out of the house behind them, dashed to the edge of the forest, and lifted his leg against a large sycamore tree.

Both twins took out their wands, murmuring, "Lumos!" and a tiny light appeared at the end of them, just enough to let them watch the path for signs of spiders.

"Good thinking," Ron said. "I'd light mine, too, but you two know--it'd probably blow up or something..."

Blaise rolled her eyes with a sigh, taking her wand out next and lighting hers up.

Harry tapped Ron on the shoulder, pointing at the grass just as Hally did the same to Blaise. Two solitary spiders were hurrying away from the wandlight into the shade of the trees.

"Okay," Ron sighed as though resigned to the worst, "I'm ready. Let's go."

So, with Fang scampering around them, sniffing tree roots and leaves, they entered the forest. By the glow of Harry, Hally, and Blaise's wands, they followed the steady trickle of spiders moving along the

path. They walked behind them for about twenty minutes, not speaking, listening hard for noises other than breaking twigs and rustling leaves. Then, when the trees had become thicker than ever, so that the stars overhead were no longer visible, and Harry, Hally, and Blaise's wand shone alone in the sea of dark, they saw their spider guides leaving the path.

The twin paused, trying to see where the spiders were going, but everything outside their little sphere of light was pitch-black. They had never been this deep into the forest before. They could vividly remember Hagrid advising them not leave the forest path last time they'd been in here. But Hagrid was miles away now, probably sitting in a cell in Azkaban, and he had also said to follow the spiders.

Something wet touched Harry and Hally's hands and they both jumped backward crushing Ron's feet, but it was only Fang's nose.

"What d'you reckon?" Harry said to Ron, whose eyes he could just make out, reflecting the light from his wand.

"We've come this far," said Ron.

So the four followed the darting shadows of the spiders into the trees. They couldn't move very quickly now; there were tree roots and stumps in their way, barely visible in the near blackness. Harry could feel Fang's hot breath on his hand. More than once, they had to stop, so that the twins could both crouch down and find the spiders in the wandlight.

They walked for what seemed like at least half an hour, their robes snagging on low-slung branches and brambles. After a while, they noticed that the ground seemed to be sloping downward, though the trees were as thick as ever.

Then Fang let loose a great, echoing bark, making both Harry, Hally, Blaise and Ron jump out of their skins.

"What?" said Ron loudly, looking around into the pitch-dark, and gripping Harry's elbow very hard.

"There's something moving over there," Harry breathed.
"Listen...sounds like something big..."

"like its draggin itself almost," Hally whispered quietly

They listened. Some distance to their right, the something big was snapping branches as it carved a path through the trees.

"Oh no," said Ron, "Oh no, oh no, oh..."

"Shut up," said Harry and Hally frantically. "It'll hear you."

"Hear me?" said Ron in an unnaturally high voice. "It's already heard Fang!"

The darkness seemed to be pressing on their eyeballs as they stood, terrified, waiting. There was a strange rumbling noise and then silence.

"What d'you think it's doing?" said Harry.

"Probably getting ready to pounce," said Ron.

"Then you first Ron," Hally blurted out, letting out a swift nervous laugh.

They waited, shivering, hardly daring to move.

"D'you think it's gone?" Harry whispered.

"Dunno..."

Then, to their right, came a sudden blaze of light, so bright in the darkness that all four of them flung up their hands to shield their eyes. Fang yelped and tried to run, but got lodged in a tangle of thorns and yelped even louder.

"Harry, Hally!" Ron shouted, his voice breaking with relief. "It's our car!"

"What?"

"Come on!"

Harry, Hally and Blaise blundered after Ron toward the light, stumbling and tripping, and a moment later they had emerged into a clearing.

Mr. Weasley's car was standing, empty, in the middle of a circle of thick trees under a roof of dense branches, its headlights ablaze. As Ron walked, open-mouthed, toward it, it moved slowly toward him, exactly like a large, turquoise dog greeting its owner.

"It's been here all the time!" Ron said delightedly, walking around the car. "Look at it. The forest's turned it wild..."

The sides of the car were scratched and smeared with mud. Apparently it had taken to trundling around the forest on its own. Fang didn't seem at all keen to it; he kept close to the twins, who could feel him quivering. Their breathing slowing down again, Harry, Hally and Blaise stuffed their wands into their holsters that were hidden under their sleeves.

"And we thought it was going to attack us!" said Ron, leaning against the car and patting it. "I wondered where it had gone!"

The twins squinted their eyes around the floodlit ground for signs of more spiders, but they had all scuttled away from the glare of the headlights.

"We've lost the trail," they said. "C'mon, let's go and find them."

Ron didn't speak. He didn't move. His eyes were fixed on a point some ten feet above the forest floor, right behind Harry, Hally and Blaise. His face was livid with terror.

Harry, Hally and Blaise didn't even have time to turn around. There was a loud clicking noise and suddenly they all felt something long and hairy seize each of them around the middle and lifted them off the ground, so that they were hanging facedown. Struggling, terrified,

they heard more clicking, and saw Ron's legs leave the ground, too, heard Fang whimpering and howling--next moment, he was being swept away into the dark trees.

Head hanging, the twins saw that what had hold of them was marching on six immensely long, hairy legs, the front two clutching them tightly below a pair of shining black pincers. Behind them, they could hear another of the creatures, no doubt, carrying Ron and Blaise. They were moving into the very heart of the forest. Harry and Hally could hear Fang fighting to free himself from a third monster, whining loudly, but neither Harry or Hally could have yelled even if they had wanted to, they seemed to have left their voices back with the car in the clearing.

They never knew how long they was in the creature's clutches; they only knew that the darkness suddenly lifted enough for them to see that the leaf-strewn ground was now swarming with spiders. Craning their necks sideways, they both realized that they had reached the ridge of a vast hollow, a hollow that had been cleared of trees, so that the stars shone brightly onto the worst scene they had ever laid eyes on.

Spiders. Not tiny spiders like those surging over the leaves below. Spiders the size of carthorses, eight-eyed, eight-legged, black, hairy, gigantic. The massive specimen that was carrying Harry and Hally made its way down the steep slope toward a misty, domed web in the very center of the hollow, while its fellows closed in all around it, clicking their pincers excitedly at the sight of its load.

The twins fell to the ground on all fours as the spider released them. Ron, Blaise, and Fang thudded down next to them. Fang wasn't howling anymore, but cowering silently on the spot. Ron and Blaise looked exactly like Harry and Hally felt. Their mouths was stretched wide in a kind of silent scream and their eyes were popping.

Harry and Hally suddenly realized that the spider that had dropped them was saying something. It had been hard to tell, because he clicked his pincers with every word he spoke.

"Aragog!" it called. "Aragog!"

And from the middle of the misty, domed web, a spider the size of a small elephant emerged, very slowly. There was gray in the black of his body and legs, and each of the eyes on his ugly, pincered head was milky white. He was blind.

"What is it?" he said, clicking his pincers rapidly.

"Men," clicked the spider who had caught Harry and Hally.

"Is it Hagrid?" said Aragog, moving closer, his eight milky eyes wandering vaguely.

"Strangers," Clicked the spider who had brought Ron and Blaise.

"Kill them," clicked Aragog fretfully. "I was sleeping..."

"We're friends of Hagrid!" the twins shouted. Their hearts seemed to have left their chests to pound in their throats.

Click, click, click went the pincers of the spiders all around the hollow.

Aragog paused.

"Hagrid has never sent men into our hollow before," he said slowly.

"Hagrid's in trouble," said Harry, breathing very fast. "That's why we've come."

"In trouble?" said the aged spider, and both twins thought they heard concern beneath the clicking pincers. "But why has he sent you?"

The twins thought of getting up to their feet, but decided against it; they didn't think their legs would support them. So Harry spoke out for both of them from the ground, as calmly as he could.

"They think, up at the school, that Hagrid's been setting a--a--something on students. They've taken him to Azkaban."

Aragog clicked his pincers furiously, and all around the hollow the sound was echoed by the crowd of spiders; it was like applause, except applause didn't usually make Harry and Hally feel sick with fear.

"But that was years ago," said Aragog fretfully. "Years and years ago. I remember it well. That's why they made him leave the school. They believed that I was the monster that dwells in that they call the Chamber of Secrets. They thought that Hagrid had opened the Chamber and set me free."

"And you...you didn't come from the Chamber of Secrets?" both Harry and Hally asked, who could feel cold sweat on their foreheads.

"I!" said Aragog, clicking angrily. "I was not born in the castle. I come from a distant land. A traveler gave me to Hagrid when I was an egg. Hagrid was only a boy, but he cared for me, hidden in a cupboard in the castle, feeding me scraps from the table. Hagrid is my good friend, and a good man. When I was discovered, and blamed for the death of a girl, he protected me. I have lived here in the forest ever since. Where Hagrid still visits me. He even found me a wife, Mosag, and you see how our family has grown, all through Hagrid's goodness..."

Harry summoned what remained of his courage while Hally gathered Fang close to her shivering.

"So you never--never attacked anyone?"

"Never," croaked the old spider. "It would have been my instinct, but out of respect for Hagrid, I never harmed a human. The body of the girl who was killed was discovered in a bathroom. I never saw any part of the castle but the cupboard in which I grew up. Our kind like the dark and the quiet..."

"But then...Do you know what did kill that girl?" said Harry. "Because whatever it is, it's back and attacking people again..."

His words were drowned by a loud outbreak of clicking and the rustling of many long legs shifting angrily; large black shapes shifted all around them.

"The thing that lives in the castle," said Aragog, "is an ancient creature we spiders fear above all others. Well do I remember how I pleaded with Hagrid to let me go, when I sensed the beast moving about the school."

"What is it?" Harry and Hally asked at once urgently.

More loud clicking, more rustling; the spiders seemed to be closing in.

"We do not speak of it!" said Aragog fiercely. "We do not name it! I never even told Hagrid the name of that dread creature, though he asked me, many times."

Harry didn't want to press the subject and Hally quickly agreed with him, not with the spiders pressing closer on all sides. Aragog seemed to be tired of talking. He was backing slowly into his domed web, but his fellow spiders continued to inch slowly toward Harry, Hally, Blaise and Ron.

"We'll just go then," Harry and Hally called desperately to Aragog, hearing leaves rustling behind them.

"Go?" said Aragog slowly. "I think not..."

"But--but--"

"My sons and daughters do not harm Hagrid, on my command. But I cannot deny them fresh meat, when it wanders so willingly into our midst. Good-bye friends of Hagrid."

The twins spun around. Feet away, towering above them, was a solid wall of spiders, clicking, their many eyes gleaming in their ugly black heads.

Even as they reached for their wands, Harry and Hally both knew it was no good, there were too many of them, but as they tried to stand, ready to die fighting, a loud, long note sounded, and a blaze of light flamed through the hollow.

's car was thundering down the slope, headlights glaring, its horn screeching, knocking spiders aside; several were thrown onto their backs, their endless legs waving in the air. The car screeched to a halt in front of Harry, Hally, Blaise and Ron and the doors flew open.

"Get Fang!" Harry and Hally yelled, each diving into the front seat; Ron seized the boarhound around the middle and threw him, yelping, into the back of the car after Blaise dived inside--the doors slammed shut--Ron didn't touch the accelerator but the car didn't need him; the engine roared and they were off, hitting more spiders. They sped up the slope, out of the hollow, and they were soon crashing through the forest, branches whipping the windows as the car wound its way cleverly through the widest gaps, following a path it obviously knew.

Both twins looked sideways at Ron. His mouth was still open in the silent scream, but his eyes weren't popping anymore. They looked back at Blaise, finding her in a much better calm, her mouth closed, but still shaking. They turned back to Ron.

"Are you okay?"

Ron stared straight ahead, unable to speak.

"Blaise?" the twins asked the brown-haired girl

"I'm okay" Blaise answered with a slight squeak

They smashed their way through the undergrowth, Fang howling loudly in the back seat, and Harry and Hally saw the side mirror snap off as they squeezed past a large oak. After ten noisy, rocky minutes, the trees thinned, and both twins could again see patches of sky.

The car stopped so suddenly that they were nearly thrown into the windshield. They had reached the edge of the forest. Fang flung himself at the window in his anxiety to get out, and when the twins opened the door together, he shot off through the trees to Hagrid's house, tail between his legs. Harry, Hally and Blaise got out, too, and after a minute or so, Ron seemed to regain the feeling in his limbs and followed, still stiff-necked and staring. Harry gave the car a

grateful pat while Hally whispered something to it doing the same before it retreated back into the forest and disappeared from view.

"Hal, what did you say to that car?" Harry asked suddenly

"I gave it directions to get to our home, that it could stay there instead of here," Hally answered him

"Hal, it doesn't...nevermind after what I seen, I believe it understood you," Harry shook his head

"But its dad's car..."

"Well I think Ron, after his enquiry he would be grateful to be rid of it, and it won't be found...besides we can talk dad into keeping the car" Hally spoke out to Ron in reason.

Ron let the subject go after hearing Hally's point come across.

They went back into Hagrid's cabin for Harry to grab his Invisibility Cloak. Fang was trembling under a blanket in his basket. When they got outside again, they found Ron being violently sick in the pumpkin patch.

"Boy he wasn't kidding about the spiders thing," Hally and Blaise both muttered in surprise. Harry gave them both a stern look.

"Follow the spiders," said Ron weakly, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. "I'll never forgive Hagrid. We're lucky to be alive."

"I bet he thought that Aragog wouldn't hurt friends of his," Harry and Hally both replied

"That's exactly Hagrid's problem!" said Ron, thumping the wall of the cabin. "He always thinks monsters aren't as bad as they're made out, and look where it's got him! A cell in Azkaban!" He was shivering uncontrollably now. "What was the point of sending us in there? What have we found out, I'd like to know?"

"That Hagrid never opened the Chamber of Secrets," both twins said with Harry throwing the invisibility Cloak over him, Blaise and Ron while Hally simply slipped her invisibility ring onto her finger. Harry prodded Ron in the arm to make him walk. "He was innocent."

Ron gave a loud snort. Evidently, hatching Aragog in a cupboard wasn't his idea of being innocent.

As the castle loomed nearer Harry twitched the cloak to sure their feet were hidden, then pushed the creaking front doors ajar. They all walked carefully back across the entrance hall after Hally gave Harry the word that she was inside and seen Blaise to her common room before heading up the marble staircase, holding their breath as they passed corridors where watchful sentries were walking. At last they reached the safety of the Gryffindor common room, where the fire had burned itself into glowing ash. They took off the cloak and climbed the winding stair to their dormitory while Hally took off her ring, heading to her dormitory.

Ron fell onto his bed without bothering to get undressed. Harry, however, didn't feel very sleepy. He sat on the edge of his four-poster, thinking hard about everything Aragog had said just as Hally quietly slipped inside the dorm.

"C'mon Hal, I don't blame you. I'm a bit scared myself," Harry whispered quietly. Hally sat down beside him on the edge of his bed, her head resting on Harry's shoulder.

The creature that was lurking somewhere in the castle, they both thought, sounded like a sort of monster Voldemort--even other monsters didn't want to name it. But Harry, Hally, Blaise, and Ron were no closer to finding out what it was, or how it Petrified its victims. Even Hagrid had never known what was in the Chamber of Secrets.

Harry swung his legs up onto his bed and leaned back against his pillows, Hally following in suit, both watching the moon glinting at them through the tower window.

They couldn't see what else they could do. They had hit dead ends everywhere. Riddle had caught the wrong person, the Heir of Slytherin had got off, and no one could tell whether it was the same person, or a different one, who had opened the Chamber this time. There was nobody else to ask. Both twins lay down, still thinking about what Aragog had said.

He was becoming drowsy when what seemed like their very last hope occurred to them, and they suddenly sat bolt upright.

"Ron," Harry hissed through the dark, "Ron--"

Ron woke with a yelp like Fang's, stared wildly around, and saw both twins.

"Ron--that girl who died. Aragog said she was found in a bathroom," both twins said, ignoring Neville's snuffling snores from the corner. "What if she never left the bathroom? What if she's still there?"

Ron rubbed his eyes, frowning through the moonlight. And then he understood, too.

"You two don't think--not Moaning Myrtle?"

A/N: that is all for chapter 26 see you in chapter 27 bye for now.

Chapter 27 THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

"All those times we were in that bathroom, and she was just three toilets away," said Ron bitterly at breakfast the next day, "and we could've asked her, and now..."

It had been hard enough trying to look for spiders. Escaping their teachers long enough to sneak into a girls' bathroom, the girls' bathroom, moreover, right next to the scene of the first attack, was going to be almost impossible.

But something happened in their first lesson, Transfiguration, that drove the Chamber of Secrets out of their minds for the first time in weeks. Ten minutes into the class, Professor McGonagall told them that their exams would start on the first of June, one week from today.

"Exams?" howled Seamus Finnigan. "We're still getting exams?"

There was a loud bang behind the twins as Neville Longbottom's wand slipped, vanishing one of the legs on his desk. Professor McGonagall restored it with a wave of her own wand, and turned, frowning to Seamus.

"The whole point of keeping the school open at this time is for you to receive your education," she said sternly. "The exams will therefore take place as usual, and I trust you are all studying hard."

Studying hard! It had never occurred to the twins that there would be exams with the castle in this state. There was a great deal of mutinous muttering around the room, which made Professor McGonagall scowl even more darkly.

"Professor Dumbledore's instructions were to keep the school running as normally as possible," she said. "And that, I need hardly point out, means finding out how much you have learned this year."

The twins looked down at the two pairs of white rabbits they were supposed to be turning into slippers. What had they learned so far this year? They couldn't seem to think of anything that would be useful in an exam.

Ron looked as though he'd just been told he had to go and live in the Forbidden Forest.

"Can you two imagine me taking exams with this?" he asked Harry and Hally both, holding up his wand, which had just started whistling loudly.

Three days before their first exam, Professor McGonagall made another announcement at breakfast.

"I have good news," she said, and the Great Hall, instead of falling silent, erupted.

"Dumbledore's coming back!" several people yelled joyfully.

"You've caught the Heir of Slytherin!" squealed a girl at the Ravenclaw table.

"Quidditch matches are back on!" roared Wood excitedly.

When the hubbub had subsided, Professor McGonagall said, "Professor Sprout has informed me that the Mandrakes are ready for cutting at last. Tonight, we will be able to revive those people who have been Petrified. I need hardly remind you all that one of them may well be able to tell us who, or what, attacked them. I am hopeful that this dreadful year will end with our catching the culprit."

There was an explosion of cheering. Harry and Hally looked towards the Slytherin table and wasn't at all surprised to see that Draco Malfoy hadn't joined in. Ron however, was looking happier than he'd looked in days.

"It won't matter that we never asked Myrtle, then!" he said to the twins. "Hermione'll probably have all the answers when they wake her up! Mind you, she'll go crazy when she finds out we've got exams in three days' time. She hasn't studied. It might be kinder to leave her where she is till they're over."

Hally rolled her eyes at Ron, "Gee Ron, what gave you that idea about Hermione knowing who it was? They all would know that you red orb!" Hally replied, bonking him on the head with a croissant.

Just then, Ginny Weasley came over and sat down next to Ron. She looked tense and nervous, and Harry and Hally both noticed that her hands were twisting in her lap.

"What's up?" said Ron, helping himself to more porridge.

Ginny didn't say anything, but glanced up and down the Gryffindor table with a scared look on her face that reminded the twins of someone, though they couldn't think who.

"Spit it out," said Ron, watching her.

The twins suddenly realized who Ginny looked like. She was rocking backward and forward slightly in her chair, exactly like Dobby did when he was teetering on the edge of revealing forbidden information.

"I've got to tell you something," Ginny mumbled, carefully not looking at the twins.

"What is it?" the twins asked at once.

Ginny looked as though she couldn't find the right words.

"What?" said Ron.

Ginny opened her mouth, but no sound came out. Both twins leaned forward while Harry spoke quietly, so that only Ginny, Hally, and Ron could hear him.

"Is it something about the Chamber of Secrets? Have you seen something? Someone acting oddly?"

Ginny drew a deep breath and, at that precise moment, Percy Weasley appeared, looking tired and wan.

"If you've finished eating, I'll take that seat, Ginny. I'm starving, I've only just come off patrol duty."

Ginny jumped up as though her chair had just been electrified, gave Percy a fleeting, frightened look, and scampered away. Percy sat down and grabbed a mug from the center of the table.

"Percy!" said Ron angrily. "She was just about to tell us something important!"

Halfway through a gulp of tea, Percy choked.

"What sort of thing?" he asked, coughing.

"I just asked her if she'd seen anything odd, and she started to say—

"Oh—that—that's nothing to do with the Chamber of Secrets," said Percy at once.

"How do you know?" Ron questioned, his eyebrows raised.

"Well, er, if you must know, Ginny, er, walked in on me the other day when I was—well, never mind—the point is, she spotted me doing something and I, um, I asked her not to mention it to anybody. I must say, I did think she'd keep her word. It's nothing really, I'd just rather—

Harry and Hally had never seen Percy look so uncomfortable, except for their first birthday party.

"What were you doing, Percy?" said Ron, grinning. "Go on tell us, we won't laugh."

Percy didn't smile back.

"Pass me the rolls, Harry, I'm starving."

The twins knew the whole mystery might be solved tomorrow without their help, but they wasn't about pass up a chance to speak to Myrtle

if it turned up—and to their delight it did, midmorning, when they were being led to History of Magic by Gilderoy Lockhart.

Lockhart, who had so often assured them that all danger had passed, only to be proved wrong right away, was now wholeheartedly convinced that it was hardly worth the trouble to see them safely down the corridors. His hair wasn't as sleek as usual; it seemed he had been up most of the night, patrolling the fourth floor.

"Mark my words," he said, ushering them around a corner. "The first words out of those poor Petrified people's mouths will be 'It was Hagrid'. Frankly, I'm astounded Professor McGonagall thinks all these security measures are necessary."

"Oh, we agree sir," Harry and Hally both said, making Ron drop his books in surprise.

"Thank you Harry and Hally," said Lockhart graciously while they waited for a long line of Hufflepuffs to pass. "I mean, we teachers have quite enough to be getting on with, without walking students to classes and standing guard all night...."

"That's right," said Ron, catching on. "Why don't you leave us here sir, we've only got one more corridor to go...."

"You know Weasley, I think I will," said Lockhart. "I really should go and prepare my next class—"

And he hurried off.

"Prepare his class," Ron sneered after him. "Gone to curl his hair more like."

They let the rest of the Gryffindors draw ahead of them, then darted down a side passage and hurried off toward Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. But just as they were congratulating each other on their brilliant scheme—

"Potters! Weasley! What are you three doing?"

It was Professor McGonagall, and her mouth was the thinnest of their lines.

“We were—we were...” Ron stammered. “We were going to—to go and see...”

“Hermione,” said Harry and Hally at once. Ron and Professor McGonagall both looked at them.

“We haven’t seen her for ages, Professor,” both twins went on hurriedly, each treading on Ron’s feet. “and we thought we’d sneak into the hospital wing, you know, and tell her the Mandrakes are nearly ready and, er, not to worry...”

Professor McGonagall was still staring at them, and for a moment, Harry and Hally thought she was going to explode, but when she spoke, it was in a strangely croaking voice.

“Of course,” she said, and both twins, amazed, saw a tear glistening in her beady eye. “Of course, I realize this has all been hardest on the friends of those who have been...I quite understand. Yes, Potters, of course you three may visit Miss Granger. I will inform Professor Binns where you’ve all gone to. Tell Madam Pomfrey I have given my permission.”

Harry, Hally and Ron walked away, hardly daring to believe that they’d avoided detention. As they turned the corner, they distinctly heard Professor McGonagall blow her nose.

“That,” said Ron fervently, “Was the best story you two have ever come up with.”

They had no choice now but to go to the hospital wing and tell Madam Pomfrey that they had Professor McGonagall’s permission to visit Hermione.

Madam Pomfrey let them in, but reluctantly.

“There’s just no point talking to a Petrified person,” she said, and they had to admit she had a point when they’d taken their seats next to

Hermione. It was plain that Hermione didn't have the faintest inkling that she had visitors, and that they might just as well tell her bedside cabinet not to worry for all the good it would do.

"Wonder if she did see the attacker, though?" said Ron, looking sadly at Hermione's rigid face. "Because if he sneaked up on them all, no one'll ever know..."

But the twins wasn't looking Hermione's face. They were more interested in her right hand. It lay clenched on top of her blankets, and bending closer, they both saw that a piece of paper was scrunched inside her fist.

Making sure that Madam Pomfrey was nowhere near, Harry pointed this out to Ron.

"Try and get it out," Ron whispered, shifting his chair so that he blocked Harry and Hally from Madam Pomfrey's view.

"You get it Hal," Harry whispered

"No Harry, you get it," Hally whispered back "Let's see how good you've gotten on swiping things," she added with a mischievous grin.

It was no easy task. Hermione's hand was clamped so tightly around the paper that Harry was sure he was going to tear it. While Ron kept watch, Hally watched as Harry tugged and twisted, and at last, after several tense minutes, the paper came free.

It was a page torn from a very old library book. Harry smoothed it out gingerly while Hally and Ron leaned closer to read it, too.

Of the many fearsome beasts and monsters that roam our land, there is none more curious or more deadly than the Basilisk, known also as the King of Serpents. This snake, which may reach gigantic size and live many hundreds of years, is born from a chicken's egg, hatched beneath a toad. Its methods of killing are most wondrous, for aside from its deadly and venomous fangs, the Basilisk has a murderous stare, and all who are fixed with the beam of its eye shall suffer instant death. Spiders flee before the Basilisk, for it is their mortal

enemy, and the Basilisk flees only from the crowing of the rooster, which is fatal to it.

And beneath this, a single word had been written, in a hand the twins recognized as Hermione's. Pipes.

It was though somebody had just flicked a light on in their brains.

"Ron," Harry breathed while Hally was muttering curses under her breath. "This is it. This is the answer. The monster in the Chamber's a Basilisk—a giant serpent! That's why Hal and I have been hearing that voice all over the place, and nobody else has heard it. It's because we both understand Parseltongue..."

Both twins looked up at the beds around them.

"The basilisk kills people by looking at them. But no one's died—because no one looked it straight in the eye. Colin saw it through his camera. The Basilisk burned up all the film inside it, but Colin just got Petrified. Justin...Justin must've seen the basilisk through Nearly Headless Nick! Nick got the full blast of it, but he couldn't die again...and Hermione and that Ravenclaw prefect were found with a mirror next to them. Hermione had just realized the monster was a basilisk. I bet you anything she warned the first person she met to look around corners with a mirror first! And that girl pulled out her mirror—and..."

Hally gave her big brother a triumphant grin while Ron's mouth had dropped.

"And Mrs. Norris?" he whispered eagerly.

Both twins thought hard, picturing the scene on the night of Halloween.

"The water..." Hally said slowly

"The flood from Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. I bet you Mrs. Norris only saw the reflection..." Harry continued next

They both scanned the page in Harry's hand eagerly. The more they looked at it, the more it made sense.

"...The crowing of the rooster...is fatal to it!" Harry read aloud. "Hagrid's roosters were killed! The Heir of Slytherin didn't want one anywhere near the castle once the Chamber was opened! Spiders flee before it! It all fits!"

"That is so low, even for the Heir of Slytherin," Hally commented after hearing Harry reread part of the page again.

"But how's the basilisk been getting around the place?" Ron asked "A giant snake...someone would've see..."

"Heard is the answer than seeing it Ron, think real hard," Hally replied while looking up at the ceiling.

Harry, however was already pointing at the word Hermione had scribbled at the foot of the page to the red-haired boy.

"Pipes Ron," Harry said. "Pipes. It's been using the school's plumbing. We've been hearing that voice inside the walls..."

"Oh..." Ron suddenly grabbed Harry's arm.

"The entrance to the Chamber of Secrets!" he said hoarsely. "What if it's a bathroom? What if it's in--"

"--Moaning Myrtle's bathroom," said Harry and Hally both.

The three sat there, excitement coursing through them, hardly able to believe it.

"This means," said Harry. "That me and Hal can't be the only Parselmouths in the school. The Heir of Slytherin's one too. That's how he's been controlling the basilisk."

"But who is it? We both practically know all of the Slytherins, including the first years Harry," Hally pointed out

"What're we going to do?" said Ron, whose eyes were flashing. "Should we go straight to McGonagall?"

"No." said Hally. "Hal we have no choice. Let's go to the staff room," said Harry, jumping up. "She'll be there in ten minutes. It's nearly break."

"Fine Harry, but I have a feeling that we won't be talking to McGonagall about this," Hally sighed in defeat getting up from her seat.

"Oh why is that Hally? Your visions again?" Ron teased while rolling his eyes

"Oh haha very funny Ron," Hally responded

"Knock it off you two. C'mon let's go," Harry intervened keeping a fight from starting.

They ran downstairs. Not wanting to be discovered hanging around in another corridor, they went straight into the deserted staff room. It was a large, paneled room full of dark, wooden chairs. Harry and Ron paced around it, too excited to sit down while Hally peered through the door noticing Blaise heading their way. Hally leaned against the wall, waited for the right moment, and then grabbed Blaise by the arm, pulling the light-brown-haired girl into the staff room.

"Hey...Hally? Harry, Ron...what's going on you three?" Blaise asked with a frown on her face.

The twins filled Blaise in on what they discovered before waiting for the bell to ring for the break.

But the bell to signal break never came.

Instead, echoing through the corridors came Professor McGonagall's voice, magically magnified.

"All students to return to their House dormitories at once. All teachers return to the staff room. Immediately please."

Harry wheeled around to stare at Ron. Both boys turned towards Hally seeing her sway innocently.

"I'm afraid that I told you so," she simply said

Ron looked from one twin to the other. "Not another attack? Not now?" Harry groaned slightly.

"What'll we do?" said Ron, aghast. "Go back to the dormitory?"

"Bloody hell no," the twins spoke out, shocking Ron

"You two just said..."

"Don't care on what we both just said." Harry intervened, glancing around. There was an ugly sort of wardrobe to his left, full of teachers' cloaks. "In here all of us. Let's hear what it's all about. Then we can tell them what we've found out."

The four hid themselves inside it, cramped up like sardines, listening to the rumbling of hundreds of people moving overhead, and the staff room door banging closed and open repeatedly. From between the musty folds of the cloaks, they watched the teachers filtering into the room. Some of them were looking puzzled, others downright scared. Then Professor McGonagall arrived.

"It has happened," she told the silent staff room. "A student has been taken by the monster. Right in the Chamber itself."

"Oh mfft!" Harry quickly covered his twin sisters mouth, keeping her quiet while they continued to listen in on the teachers.

Professor Flitwick let out a squeal. Professor Sprout clapped her hands over her mouth. Severus Snape gripped the back of a chair very hard and said, "How can you be sure?"

"The Heir of Slytherin," said Professor McGonagall, who was very white, "left another message. Right underneath the first one. 'Her skeleton will lie in the Chamber forever.' "

Professor Flitwick burst into tears.

"Who is it?" said Madam Hooch, who had sunk, weak-kneed, into a chair. "Which student?"

"Ginny Weasley," said Professor McGonagall.

The twins felt Ron slide silently down onto the wardrobe floor beside them.

"We shall have to send all the students home tomorrow," said Professor McGonagall. "This is the end of Hogwarts. Dumbledore always said..."

The staffroom door banged open again. For one wild moment, Harry and Hally was sure it would be Dumbledore. But it was Lockhart, and he was beaming.

"So sorry--dozed off--what have I missed?"

They didn't seem to notice that the other teachers were looking at him with something remarkably like hatred. Severus stepped forward.

"Just the man," he said. "The very man. A girl has been snatched by the monster, Lockhart. Taken into the Chamber of Secrets itself. Your moment has come at last."

The twins started sniggering quietly along with Blaise, Ron, however was still in shock over the news about his sister Ginny.

Lockhart blanched.

"That's right Gilderoy," chipped in Professor Sprout. "Weren't you saying just last night that you've known all along where the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets is?"

Now this bit of information got to the four hidden inside the wardrobe as they made sure not to make a sound, and concentrated on hearing every word.

"I--well, I--" sputtered Lockhart.

"Yes, didn't you tell me you were sure you knew what was inside it?" piped up Professor Flitwick.

"Gods I love my charm Professor," Hally whispered, grinning evilly. Harry, Ron, and Blaise stifled they sniggers from Hally's comment.

"D-did I? I don't recall--"

"I certainly remember you saying you were sorry you hadn't had a crack at the monster before Hagrid was arrested," said Severus. "Didn't you say that the whole affair had been bungled, and that you should have been given a free rein from the first?"

"Dad your the best," both twins whispered, cheering Severus on silently with Ron and Blaise.

Lockhart stared around at his stony-faced colleagues.

"I-I really never--you may have misunderstood--"

"We'll leave it to you, then, Gilderoy," said Professor McGonagall. "Tonight will be an excellent time to do it. We'll make sure everyone's out of your way. You'll be able to tackle the monster all by yourself. A free rein at last."

Hally looked upwards, grinning from ear to ear, "Remind me to get Professor McGonagall something extra nice for her birthday."

Harry, Ron, and Blaise covered their mouths, silencing their laughter.

Lockhart gazed desperately around him, but nobody came to the rescue. He didn't look remotely handsome anymore. His lip was trembling, and in the absence of his usually toothy grin, he looked weak-chinned and feeble.

"V-very well," he said. "I'll--I'll be in my office, getting--getting ready."

And he left the room.

"Right," said Professor McGonagall, whose nostrils were flared, "That's got him out from under our feet. The Heads of Houses should go and inform their students what has happened. Tell them the Hogwarts Express will take them home first thing tomorrow. Will the rest of you please make sure no students have been left outside their dormitories...Severus inform your houseelves that your twins will be on their way home first thing tomorrow."

The teachers rose and left, one by one.

When the staff room became silent, the four scrambled out of the wardrobe after collecting themselves from laughing over Lockhart's dilemma.

It was probably the worst day of the twins' entire life so far. Harry, Hally, Ron, Fred, George, and Blaise after sneaking her in, sat in a corner of the Gryffindor common room, unable to say anything to each other. Percy wasn't there. He had gone to send an owl to Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, then shut himself up in his dormitory.

No afternoon ever lasted as long as that one, nor had Gryffindor Tower ever been so crowded, yet so quiet. Near sunset, Fred and George went up to bed, unable to sit there any longer.

"She knew something, you two," said Ron, speaking for the first time since they had entered the wardrobe in the staff room. "That's why she was taken. It wasn't some stupid thing about Percy at all. She'd found out something about the Chamber of Secrets. That must be why she was--" Ron rubbed his eyes frantically. "I mean, she was a pure-blood. There can't be any other reason."

Harry and Hally both could see the sun sinking. Blood-red, below the skyline. This was the worst they had ever felt. If only there was something they could do. Anything.

"Hey you two," Ron said. "D'you think there's any chance at all she's not--you know--"

Both twins didn't know what to say. They couldn't see how Ginny could still be alive.

"D'you know what?" said Ron. "I think we should all go and see Lockhart. Tell him what we know. He's going to try and get into the Chamber. We can tell him where we think it is, and tell him it's a basilisk in there."

Because neither twin couldn't think of anything else to do, and because they wanted to be doing something, they agreed for Ginny's sake. The Gryffindors around them were so miserable, and felt so sorry for the Weasleys, that nobody tried to stop them as they all got up, crossed the room, and left through the portrait hole with Blaise following behind them.

Darkness was falling as they walked down to Lockhart's office. There seemed to be a lot of activity going on inside it. They could hear scraping, thumps, and hurried footsteps.

Harry knocked and there was a sudden silence from inside. Then the door opened the tiniest crack and they saw one of Lockhart's eyes peering through it.

"Oh--Mr. Potter--Miss. Potter--Mr. Weasley--Miss. Zabini--" he said, opening the door a bit wider. "I'm rather busy at the moment--if you four would be quick--"

"Professor, we've got some information for you," said Harry and Hally both. "We think it'll help you."

"Er--well--it's not terribly--" The side of Lockhart's face that they could see looked very uncomfortable. "I mean--well--all right--"

He opened the door and they entered.

His office had been almost completely stripped. Two large trunks stood open on the floor. Robes, jade-green, lilac, midnight-blue, had been hastily folded into one of them; books, were jumbled untidily into the other. The photographs that had covered the walls were now crammed into boxes on the desk.

"Are you going somewhere?" Harry asked. Hally narrowed her eyes at the Dark Arts Professor.

"Er, well, yes," said Lockhart, ripping a life-size poster of himself from the back of the door as he soke and starting to roll it up. "Urgent call--unavoidable--got to go--"

"Why you lying, sneaky, low life con! You don't have and urgent call at all! Your trying to slip out of here without getting noticed!" Hally accused

"What about my sister?" Said Ron jerkily.

"Well, as to that--most unfortunate--" said Lockhart, avoiding their eyes as he wrenched open a drawer and started emptying the contents into a bag. "No one regrets more than I--"

"You're the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher!" said Harry. "You can't go now! Not with all the Dark stuff going on here!"

"Well-I must say--when I took the job--" Lockhart muttered, now piling socks on top of his robes. "nothing in the job description--didn't expect--"

"What Lockhart? Jump in when needed?" Hally pressed stiffly

"So you mean you're running away?" said Harry disbelievingly. "After all that so called stuff you were supposed to have done in your books--"

"Books can be misleading," said Lockhart delicately.

"You wrote them Lockhart!" both twins shouted.

"My dear Mr and Miss Potter," said Lockhart, straightening up and frowning at Harry and Hally. " Do use your common senses. My books wouldn't have sold half as well if people didn't think I'd done all those things. No one wants to read about some ugly old Armenian warlock, even if he did save a village from werewolves. He'd look

dreadful on the front cover. No dress sense at all. And the witch who banished the Bandon Banshee had a harelip. I mean, come on--"

Hally snapped her fingers. "See I told you all that he was a big fat fraud!"

"So you've just been taking credit for what a load of other people have done?" Said Harry incredulously.

"Harry, Hally," said Lockhart, shaking his head impatiently, "It's not nearly as simple as that. There was work involved. I had to track these people down. Ask them exactly how they managed to do what they did. Then I had to put a Memory Charm on them so they wouldn't remember doing it. If there's one thing I pride myself on, it's my Memory Charms. No, it's been a lot of work, Harry and Hally. It's not all book signings and publicity photos, you know. You want fame, you have to be prepared for a long hard slog."

He banged the lids of his trunks shut and locked them.

"Let's see." he said. "I think that's everything. Yes. Only one thing left."

He pulled out his wand and turned to them.

"Awfully sorry you four, but I'll have to put a Memory Charm on you now. Can't have you blabbing my secrets all over the place. I'd never sell another book--"

"Flick" Flick"

The twins had their wands in their hands just in time. Lockhart had barely raised his, when both twins bellowed, "Expelliarmus!"

Lockhart was blasted backward, falling over his trunk; his wand flew high into the air, Ron caught it, and flung it out of the open window.

"We really must thank our dad Professor Snape for training us extra hard," Harry said furiously, kicking Lockhart's trunk aside. Lockhart

looked up at the twins, feeble once more. Harry and Hally both was still pointing their wands at him.

"What d'you want me to do?" said Lockhart weakly. "I don't know where the Chamber of Secrets is. There's nothing I can do."

"You're in luck," said Harry, forcing Lockhart to his feet at wandpoint.

"We think we know where it is." Said Hally next.

"And what's inside it. Let's go" Harry demanded.

They all marched Lockhart out of his office and down the nearest stairs, along the dark corridor where the messages shone on the wall, to the door of Moaning Myrtle's bathroom.

They sent Lockhart in first. Harry and Hally both was pleased to see that he was shaking.

Moaning Myrtle was sitting on the tank of the end toilet.

"Oh, it's you two," she said when she saw Harry and Hally. "What do you two want this time."

"Just one question Myrtle" Hally answered.

"Oh? And what's that?" Myrtle pressed

"To ask you how you died," said Harry.

Myrtle's whole aspect changed at once. She looked as though she had never been asked such a flattering question.

"Ooooh, it was dreadful," she said with relish. "It happened right in here. I died in this very stall. I remember it so well. I'd hidden because Olive Hornby was teasing me about my glasses. The door was locked, and I was crying, and then I heard somebody come in. They said something funny. A different language, I think it must have been. Anyway, what really got me was that it was a boy speaking. So I

unlocked the door, to tell him to go and use his own toilet, and then--" Myrtle swelled importantly, her face shining. "I died."

"How?" asked the twins

"No idea," said Myrtle in hushed tones. "I just remember seeing a pair of great, big, yellow eyes. My whole body sort of seized up, and then I was floating away..." She looked dreamily at Harry. Hally raised her eyebrows up at the scene. "And then I came back again. I was determined to haunt Olive Hornby, you see. Oh, she was sorry she'd ever laughed at my glasses."

"Harry, Myrtle has a crush on you," Hally whispered warily, not moving her lips.

Harry shook his head slightly, waving Hally's suspicion off. "Where exactly did you see the eyes?" Harry asked finally.

"Somewhere there," said Myrtle, pointing vaguely toward the sink in front of her toilet.

Harry, Hally, Ron and Blaise hurried over to it. Lockhat was standing well back, a look of utter terror on his face.

It looked like an ordinary sink. They all examined every inch of it, inside and out, including the pipes below. And then both twins saw it: scratched on the side of one of the copper taps was a tiny snake.

"That tap's never worked," said Myrtle brightly as Harry tried to turn it.

"Harry, Hally," said Ron. "Say something. Something in Parseltongue."

"But--" Harry and Hally thought hard. The only times they'd ever managed to speak Parseltongue were when they'd been faced with a real snake. They both stared hard at the tiny engraving, trying to imagine it was real.

"Open up," they said.

They both looked at Ron and Blaise, who shook their heads.

"English," they told them

Harry and Hally looked back at the snake, willing themselves to believe it was alive. If he moved his head, the candlelight made it look as though it were moving.

"Open up," they said once more.

Except that the words weren't what they heard; a strange hissing had escaped them both, and at once the tap glowed with a brilliant white light and began to spin. Next second, the sink began to move; the sink in fact, sank, right out of sight, leaving a large pipe exposed, a pipe wide enough for a man to slide into.

The twins heard Ron and Blaise gasp and looked up again. They had made up their mind what they was going to do.

"We're going down there," they said.

They couldn't not go, not now they had found the entrance to the Chamber, not if there was even the faintest, slimmest, wildest chance that Ginny might be alive.

"Me, too," said Ron

"And me," said Blaise

There was a pause.

"Well, you hardly seem to need me," said Lockhart, with a shadow of his old smile. "I'll just--"

He put his hand on the door knob, but Ron, Blaise, Hally and Harry both pointed their wands at him.

"You can go first," Ron snarled.

"Yeah Lockhart, you first." Harry, Hally and Blaise agreed.

White-faced and wandless, Lockhart approached the opening.

"Children," he said, his voice feeble. "Children, what good will it do?"

The twins jabbed him in the back with their wands. Lockhart slid his legs into the pipe.

"I really don't think--" he started to say, but Ron gave him a push and he slid out of sight. Harry went in next, followed by Hally. They lowered themselves slowly into the pipe, then let go.

It was like rushing down an endless, slimy, dark slide. They could see more pipes branching off in all directions, but none as large as theirs, which twisted and turned, sloping steeply downward, and they knew that they was falling deeper below the school than even the dungeons. Behind them they could hear Ron and Blaise, thudding slightly at the curves.

And then, just as they had begun to worry about what would happen when they hit ground, the pipe leveled out, and they shot out of the end with a wet thud, landing on the damp floor of a dark stone tunnel large enough to stand in. Lockhart was getting to his feet a little ways away, covered in slime and white as a ghost. Harry and Hally stood aside as Ron and Blaise came whizzing out of the pipe, too.

"We must be miles under the school," said Harry, his voice echoing in the black tunnel.

"Way under the school," Hally commented taking a look at their surroundings.

"Under the lake, probably," said Ron, squinting around at the dark, slimy walls.

All five of them turned to stare into the darkness ahead.

"Lumos!" Harry, Hally and Blaise muttered to their wands and they lit again.

"C'mon," said Harry to his sister and the others, and off they went, their footsteps slapping loudly on the wet floor.

The tunnel was so dark that they could only see a little distance ahead. Their shadows on the wet walls looked monstrous in the wandlight.

"Remember," Harry said quietly as they walked cautiously forward, "any sign of movement, close your eyes right away..."

But the tunnel was quiet as the grave, and the first unexpected sound they heard was a loud crunch as Ron stepped on what turned out to be a rat's skull. Harry lowered his wand to look at the floor and saw that it was littered with small animal bones. Trying very hard not to imagine what Ginny might look like if they found her, Harry and Hally led the way forward, around a dark bend in the tunnel.

"Harry, Hally--there's something up there--" said Ron hoarsely, grabbing both Harry and Hally's shoulders.

They all froze. The twins could just see the outline of something huge and curved, lying right across the tunnel. It wasn't moving.

"Maybe it's asleep," they breathed, glancing back at the others. Lockhart's hands were pressed over his eyes. Harry and Hally turned back to look at the thing, their hearts beating so fast it hurt.

Very slowly, their eyes as narrow as they could make them and still see, Harry and Hally edged forward, their wands held high.

The lights slid over a gigantic snake skin, of a vivid, poisonous green, lying curled and empty across the tunnel floor. The creature that had shed it must have been twenty feet long at least.

"Blimey," Ron said weakly.

There was a sudden movement behind them. Gilderoy Lockhart's knees had given way.

"Get up," said Ron sharply, pointing his broken wand at Lockhart.

Lockhart got to his feet--then dived at Ron, knocking him to the ground.

Harry, Hally and Blaise jumped forward, but too late--Lockhart was straightening up, panting, Ron's wand in his hand and a gleaming smile back on his face.

"The adventure ends here, children!" he said, "I shall take a bit of this skin back up to the school, tell them I was too late to save the girl, and that you four tragically lost your minds at the sight of her mangled body--say good-bye to your memories!"

Harry, Hally and Blaise crossed their arms with hidden grins on their face, knowing what was to come from Ron's wand.

Lockhart raised Ron's spellotaped wand high over his head and yelled, "Obliviate!"

The wand exploded with the force of a small bomb. The twins flung their arms over their heads and ran, both slipping over the coils of snake skin, out of the way of great chunks of tunnel ceiling that were thundering to the floor. Next moment, they were standing together alone, gazing at a solid wall of broken rock.

"Ron! Blaise!" they both shouted, "Are you two okay? Ron! Blaise!"

"We're here!" Came Ron and Blaise's muffled voices from behind the rockfall. "We're okay--this git's not, though--he got blasted by the wand--"

There was a dull thud and a loud "OW!" it sounded as though Ron and Blaise both had just kicked Lockhart in the shins.

"What now?" Ron's voice said, sounding desperate. "We can't get through--it'll take ages..."

The twins looked up at the tunnel ceiling. Huge cracks had appeared in it. They had never tried to break apart anything as large as these

rocks by magic, and now didn't seem a good moment to try--what if the whole tunnel caved in?

There was another "OW!" from behind the rocks. They were wasting time. Ginny had already been in the Chamber of Secrets for hours... Harry and Hally knew there was only one thing to do.

"Wait there," they called to Ron and Blaise. "Wait with Lockhart. We'll go on... If we're not back in an hour..."

There was a very pregnant pause.

"We'll try and shift some of this rock," said Ron, who seemed to be trying to keep his voice steady. "So you two can--can get back through. And Harry, Hally--"

"See you two in a bit," said Harry and Hally, trying to inject some confidence into their shaking voices.

And they set off together past the giant snake skin.

Soon the distant sound of Ron and Blaise straining to shift the rocks was gone. The tunnel turned and turned again. Every nerve in Harry and Hally's bodies was tingling unpleasantly. They wanted the tunnel to end, yet dreaded what they'd find when it did. And then, at last, as they crept around yet another bend, they saw a solid wall ahead on which two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great, glinting emeralds.

Harry and Hally approached, their throats very dry. There was no need to pretend these stone snakes were real; their eyes looked strangely alive.

They could guess what they had to do. They both cleared their throats, and the emerald eyes seemed to flicker.

"Open," said Harry and Hally, in a low, faint hiss.

The serpents parted as the wall cracked open, the halves slid smoothly out of sight, and Harry and Hally, shaking from head to foot, took each others hands and stepped inside.

A/N: that is all for chapter 27. see you in chapter 28 bye for now.

Chapter 28 THE HEIR OF SLYTHERIN

They were standing at the end of a very long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents rose to support a ceiling lost in darkness, casting long, black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that filled the place.

Their hearts beating very fast, Harry and Hally stood listening to the chill silence. Could the basilisk be lurking in a shadowy corner, behind a pillar? And where was Ginny?

They pulled out their wands and moved forward between the serpentine columns. Every careful footstep echoed loudly off the shadowy walls. They kept their eyes narrowed, ready to clamp them shut at the smallest sign of movement. The hollow eye sockets of the stone snakes seemed to be following them. More than once, with a jolt of their stomachs, they both thought they seen one stir.

Then, as they both drew level with the last pair of pillars, a statue high as the Chamber itself loomed into view, standing against the back wall.

The twins had to crane their necks to look up into the giant face above; it was ancient and monkeyish, with a long, thin beard that fell almost to the bottom of the wizard's sweeping stone robes, where two enormous gray feet stood on the smooth Chamber floor. And between the feet, facedown, lay a small, black-robed figure with flaming-red hair.

"Oh my gods Ginny," Hally uttered with wide eyes.

"Ginny!" Harry muttered, sprinting to her with Hally and dropping to their knees. "Ginny—don't be dead—please don't be dead..." Harry flung his wand aside, grabbed Ginny's shoulders, and turned her over. Her face was white as marble, and as cold, yet her eyes were closed, so she wasn't Petrified. But then she must be—

"Harry..." "Ginny, please wake up," Harry muttered desperately, shaking her. Ginny's head lolled hopelessly from side to side.

“Harry, someone’s here,” Hally spoke, trying to get his attention.

“Hal, we have to wake Ginny up...”

“She won’t wake,” said a soft voice.

Harry jumped and spun around on his knees in the direction of where his twin sister was looking.

A tall, black-haired boy was leaning against the nearest pillar, watching them. He was strangely blurred around the edges, as though Harry and Hally were looking at him through a misted window. But there was no mistaking him—

“Tom—Tom Riddle?”

Riddle nodded, not taking his eyes off Harry and Hally’s faces.

“What d’you mean, she won’t wake?” Harry asked desperately. “She’s no—she’s not--?”

“She’s still alive,” said Riddle. “But only just.”

The twins stared at him. Tom Riddle had been at Hogwarts fifty years ago, yet here he stood, a weird, misty light shining about him, not a day older than sixteen.

“Are you a ghost?” Harry said uncertainly.

“One that comes and goes as they please?” Hally asked wearily.

“A memory,” said Riddle quietly. “Preserved in a diary for fifty years.”

He pointed toward the floor near the statue’s giant toes. Lying open there was a little black diary Harry and Hally had found in Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. For a second, both twins wondered how it had got there—but there were more pressing matters to deal with.

“You’ve got to help us Tom,” Harry said, raising Ginny’s head again. We’ve got to get her out of here. There’s a basilisk...we don’t know where it is, but it could be along any moment....please, help us....”

Riddle didn’t move. Harry, sweating, managed to hoist Ginny half off the floor, and bent to pick up his wand again.

“I don’t think he wants to do that big brother,” Hally commented, keeping her eyes on Riddle.

Harry looked around for his wand, but his wand had gone.

“Did you see...” “Um Harry, he has it,” Hally pointed over at Riddle.

Harry looked up finally to see Riddle was still watching them—twirling Harry’s wand between his long fingers.

“Thanks,” said Harry, stretching out his hand for it.

A smile curled the corners of Riddle’s mouth. He continued to stare at Harry, twirling the wand idly.

“Listen,” said Harry, urgently, his knees sagging with Ginny’s dead weight. “We’ve got to go! If the basilisk comes—

“It won’t come until it is called,” said Riddle calmly.

Harry lowered Ginny back onto the floor, unable to hold her up any longer.

“What d’you mean?” he said. “Look, give me my wand, I might need it, and besides it won’t work for you anyway....”

Riddle’s smile broadened.

“But you won’t be needing it,” he said.

Harry stared at him.

“What d’you mean, I won’t be--?”

"I've waited a long time for this, Harry Potter," said Riddle. "For the chance to see you, only the presence of your twin sister's life still existing surprised even me, but it does not matter, I wanted a chance to speak to you—both now that I found out about her still being...alive."

"Look," said Harry, losing patience, "I don't think you get it. We're in the Chamber of Secrets. We can talk later..."

"I think he knows that already Harry," Hally mumbled, staying alert.

"We're going to talk now," said Riddle, still smiling broadly, and he pocketed Harry's wand.

"That's not yours! Give it back to my brother!" Hally hissed in anger suddenly.

Harry stared at Riddle. There was something very funny going on here...

"How did Ginny get like this?" he asked slowly.

"Well, that's an interesting question," said Riddle pleasantly. "And quite a long story. I suppose the real reason Ginny Weasley's like this is because she opened her heart and spilled all her secrets to an invisible stranger."

"What are you talking about?" Harry questioned.

"The diary," said Riddle. "My diary. Little Ginny's been writing in it for months and months, telling me all her pitiful worries and woes—how her brothers tease her, how she had to come to school with secondhand robes and books, how"—Riddle's eyes glinted—"how she didn't think famous, good, great Harry and Hally Potter would ever like her...."

All the time he spoke, Riddle's eyes never left Harry's face. There was an almost hungry look in them.

"I think your lying," Hally blurted out. "Ginny knows that she one of my best friends, and she wouldn't think that about Harry either!" Hally knelt down beside Ginny, taking one of the girl's hands in her own warm hand.

"What a pity if you actually think that," Riddle replied stiffly before continuing. "It's very boring, having to listen to the silly little troubles of an eleven-year-old girl," he went on. "But I was patient. I wrote back. I was sympathetic, I was kind. Ginny simply loved me. No one's ever understood me like you Tom...I'm so glad I've got this diary to confide in...it's like having a friend I can carry around in my pocket...."

Riddle laughed, a high, cold laugh that didn't suit him. It made the hairs stand up on the back of both twins' necks.

"If I say it myself you two, I've always been able to charm the people I needed. So Ginny poured out her soul to me, and her soul happened to be exactly what I wanted.... I grew stronger and stronger on a diet of her darkest secrets. I grew powerful, far more powerful than little Miss Weasley. Powerful enough to start feeling Miss Weasley a few of my secrets, to start pouring a little of my soul back into her...."

"What d'you mean?" Harry asked, whose mouth had gone very dry while Hally was getting angrier and angrier from each word that came from Riddle.

"Haven't you guessed yet, Harry Potter?" said Riddle softly. "Your sister has from what I'm seeing. Ginny Weasley opened the Chamber of Secrets. She strangled the school roosters and daubed threatening messages on the walls. She set the Serpent of Slytherin on four Mudbloods, and the Squib's cat."

"No," Harry whispered.

"Through you no doubt!" Hally hissed out, growling and getting ready for a fight.

"Yes," said Riddle, calmly. "Of course, she didn't know what she was doing at first. It was very amusing. I wish you both could have seen

her new diary entries...far more interesting, they became....Dear Tom," he recited, watching Harry's horrified face and Hally's very angry one. "I think I'm losing my memory. There are rooster feathers all over my robes and I don't know how they got there. Dear Tom, I can't remember what I did on the night of Halloween, but a cat was attacked and I've got paint all down my front. Dear Tom, Percy keeps telling me I'm pale and I'm not myself. I think he suspects me...There was another attack today and I don't know where I was. Tom, what am I going to do? I think I'm going mad...I think I'm the one attacking everyone, Tom!"

"It took a very long time for stupid little Ginny to stop trusting her diary." Said Riddle. "But she finally became suspicious and tried to dispose of it. And that's where you two came in. You both found it, and I couldn't have been more delighted. Of all the people who could have picked it up, it was you, the very person I was most anxious to meet, only that very same day I discover your twin is still very much alive...."

"And why did you want to meet me?" said Harry. Anger was coursing through him the same time as anger coursed through his twin, and it was an effort to keep his voice steady.

"Well you see, Ginny told me all about you Harry," said Riddle. "Your whole fascinating history." His eyes roved over the lightening scar on Harry and Hally's foreheads, and their expression grew hungrier. "But she forgot to mention your sister being around, although I must knew I must find out more about you, talk to you, meet you if I could. So I decided to show you my famous capture of that great oaf Hagrid, to gain both of you two's trust—

"I didn't trust you then, and I don't trust you now!" Hally shouted out, her claws slowly extending on each of her hands.

"Hagrid's out friend," said Harry, his voice now shaking. "And you framed him, didn't you? We both thought you made a mistake, but—

Riddle laughed his high laugh again.

"It was my word against Hagrid's Harry Potter. Well, you can imagine how it looked to old Armando Dippet. On the one hand, Tom Riddle, poor but brilliant, parentless but so brave, school prefect, model student...on the other hand, big, blundering Hagrid, in trouble every other week, trying to raise werewolf cubs under his bed, sneaking off to the Forbidden Forest to wrestle trolls...but I admit, even I was surprised how well the plan worked. I thought someone must realize that Hagrid couldn't possibly be the Heir of Slytherin. It had taken me five whole years to find out everything I could about the Chamber of Secrets and discover the secret entrance...as though Hagrid had the brains, or the power!

"Only the Transfiguration teacher, Dumbledore, seemed to think Hagrid was innocent. He persuaded Dippet to keep Hagrid and train him as gamekeeper. Yes, I think Dumbledore might have guessed....Dumbledore never seemed to like me as much as the other teachers did...."

"I bet Dumbledore saw right through you," said Harry, his teeth gritted.

"The look on his face says your right Harry," Hally seethed through clenched teeth.

"Well, he certainly kept an annoyingly close watch on me after Hagrid was expelled." Said Riddle carelessly. "I knew it wouldn't be safe to open the Chamber again while I was still at school. But I wasn't going to waste those long years I'd spent searching for it. I decided to leave behind a diary, preserving my sixteen-year-old self in its pages, so that one day, with luck, I would be able to lead another in my footsteps, and finish Salazar Slytherin's noble work."

"Well, you haven't finished it," said Harry triumphantly. "No one's died this time, not even the cat. In a few hours the Mandrake Draught will be ready and everyone who was Petrified will be all right again..."

"Haven't I already told you two," said Riddle quietly, "that killing Mudbloods doesn't matter to me anymore? For many months now, my new target has been...now is--you two."

Both twins stared at him.

"Imagine how angry I was when the next time my diary was opened, it was Ginny who was writing to me, not you two. She saw you both with the diary, you see, and panicked. What if you two found out how to work it, and I repeated all her secrets to you both? What if, even worse, I told you both who'd been strangling roosters? So the foolish little brat waited until your dormitory was deserted Harry and stole it back. But I knew what I must do. It was clear to me that you both were on the trail of Slytherin's heir. From everything Ginny had told me about you, I knew you both would go to any lengths to solve the mystery--particularly if one of your best friends was attacked. And Ginny had told me the whole school was buzzing because you two could speak Parseltongue...

"So I made Ginny write her own farewell on the wall and come down here to wait. She struggled and cried and became very boring. But there isn't much life left in her...She put too much into the diary, into me. Enough to let me leave its pages at last...I have been waiting for you two to appear since we arrived here. I knew you two would come. I have many questions for you both Harry and Hally Potter."

"We're touched really," Hally sneered while slapping her hand across her chest in a mocked touching emotion.

"Like what?" Harry spat, fists still clenched.

"Well," said Riddle, smiling pleasantly, "how is it that you two--a skinny boy with no extraordinary magical talent--managed to defeat the greatest wizard of all time? And how is it a mere girl could come out in one piece like her brother and help to defeat the greatest wizard of all time? How did you two escape with nothing but a scar on each of you, while Lord Volemort's powers were destroyed?"

There was an odd red gleam in his hungry eyes now.

"Why do you care how we escaped?" said Harry slowly.

"Voldemort was after your time..." Hally's voice trailed off

"Voldemort," said Riddle softly, "Is my past, present, and future, Harry and Hally Potter..."

He pulled Harry's wand from his pocket and began to trace it through the air writing three shimmering words:

TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE

Then he waved the wand once, and the letters of his name rearranged themselves.

I AM LORD VOLDEMORT

"You see?" he whispered, "It was a name I was already using at Hogwarts, to my most intimate friends only, of course. You think I was going to use my filthy Muggle father's name forever? I, in whose veins runs the blood of Salazar Slytherin himself, through my mother's side? I, keep the name of a foul, common Muggle, who abandoned me even before I was born, just because he found out his wife was a witch? No, Potters--I fashioned myself a new name I knew wizards everywhere would one day fear to speak, when I had become the greatest sorcerer in the world!"

The twins' brains seemed to have jammed. They stared numbly at Riddle, at the orphaned boy who had grown up to murder their own parents, and so many others...At last Harry forced himself to speak while Hally stayed alertive.

"You're not," he said, his quiet voice full of hatred.

"Not what?" snapped Riddle.

"Not the greatest sorcerer in the world," said Harry, breathing fast. "Sorry to disappoint you and all that, but the greatest wizard in the world is Albus Dumbledore. Everyone says so. Even when you were strong, you didn't dare try and take over at Hogwarts. Dumbledore saw right through you when you were at school and he still frightens you now, wherever you're hiding these days--"

The smile had gone from Riddle's face, to be replaced by a very ugly look.

"Oh, I think he didn't like that one Harry," Hally smirked slightly, still in full alert.

"Dumbledore's been driven out of this castle by the mere memory of me!" Riddle hissed.

"Boy you are so stupid," Hally sneered at Riddle.

"He's not as gone as you might think pea brain!" Harry retorted. He was speaking at random, wanting to scare Riddle, wishing rather than believing it to be true. Hally looked up at her brother. 'It is true Harry, always believe that,' Hally thought to him in reassurance.

Riddle opened his mouth, but froze.

Music was coming from somewhere. Riddle whirled around to stare down the empty Chamber. The music was growing louder. It was eerie, spine-tingling, unearthly; it lifted the hair on Harry and Hally's scalps and made their hearts feel a though it was swelling to twice their normal sizes. Then, as the music reached such a pitch that both twins felt it vibrating inside his own ribs, flames erupted at the top of the nearest pillar.

A crimson bird the size of a swan had appeared, piping its weird music to the vaulted ceiling. It had a glittering golden tail as long as a peacock's and gleaming golden talons, which were gripping a ragged bundle.

A second later, the bird was flying straight at Harry and Hally. It dropped the ragged thing it was carrying at his feet, then landed heavily on his shoulder. As it folded its great wings, Harry looked up and saw it had a long, sharp golden beak and a beady black eye.

The bird stopped singing. It sat still and warm next to Harry's cheek, gazing steadily at Riddle.

"That's a phoenix..." Said Riddle, staring shrewdly back at it.

"Fawkes?" Harry breathed, and he felt the bird's golden claws squeeze his shoulder gently.

"Hello Fawkes, join the party," Hally grinned up at the bird.

"And that--" said Riddle, now eyeing the ragged thing that Fawkes had dropped, "that's the old school sorting hat--"

So it was. Patched, frayed, and dirty, the hat lay motionless at Harry's feet.

Riddle began to laugh again. He laughed so hard that the dark chamber rang with it, as though ten Riddles were laughing at once--

"This is what Dumbledore sends his defenders? A songbird and an old hat! Do you two feel brave, Potters? Do you feel safe now?"

Harry and Hally didn't answer. They might not see what use Fawkes or the Sorting Hat were, but they were no longer alone, and they waited for Riddle to stop laughing with their courage mounting.

"To business Potters," said Riddle, still smiling broadly. "Twice--in your pasts, in my future--we have met. And twice I failed to kill you both. How did you two survive? Tell me everything. The longer you talk," he added softly, "the longer you both stay alive."

Harry was thinking fast, weighing his chances while Hally had done forgotten all about Ginny for the moment, and stood up beside her brother, glaring at Riddle. Riddle had Harry's wand. They, Harry and Hally had Fawkes and the sorting Hat, neither which would be much good in a duel. It looked bad, all right...but the longer Riddle stood there, the more life was dwindling out of Ginny... and in the meantime, Both twins noticed suddenly, Riddle's outline was becoming clearer, more solid...If it had to be a fight between them and Riddle, better sooner than later.

"No one knows why you lost your powers when you attacked us," Harry said abruptly. "I don't know myself. But I know why you couldn't kill us. Because our mother died to save us. Our common Muggel-

born mother," he added, shaking with suppressed rage. "She stopped you killing us. And we've seen the real you, we both saw you last year. You're a wreck. You're barely alive. That's where all your power got you. You're in hiding. You're ugly, you're foul--"

Riddle's face contorted. Then he forced it into an awful smile.

"So. Your mother died to save you both. Yes, that's a powerful countercharm. I can see now...there is nothing special about you two, after all. I wondered, you see. There are strange likenesses between us, after all. Even you two must have noticed. Both half-bloods, orphans..."

"Who said we was orphans?" Hally demanded the question

"Separated yes, but not orphans! We have a family!" both twins yelled in anger.

Riddle looked at the two, then continued.

"Perhaps. Probably the only three Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even look something alike...but after all, it was merely a lucky chance that save you both from me. That's all I wanted to know."

Both twins stood, tense, waiting for Riddle to raise Harry's wand. But Riddle's twisted smile was widening again.

"Now, Potters, I'm going to teach you both a little lesson. Let's match the powers of Lord Voldemort, Heir of Salazar Slytherin, against famous Harry and Hally Potter, and the best weapons Dumbledore can give them..."

He cast an amused eye over Fawkes and the Sorting Hat, then walked away. Harry and Hally's fear, spreading up their numb legs, watched Riddle stop between the high pillars and look up into the stone face of Slytherin, high above him in the half-darkness. Riddle opened his mouth wide and hissed--but Harry and Hally understood what he was saying...

"Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four."

Both twins wheeled around to look up at the statue, Fawkes swaying on Harry's shoulder.

Slytherin's gigantic stone face was moving. Horrostruck, Harry and Hally saw his mouth opening, wider and wider, to make a huge black hole.

And something was stirring inside the statue's mouth. Something was slithering up from its depths.

Harry and Hally backed away until they hit the dark Chamber wall, and as they shut their eyes tight, Harry felt Fawkes' wing sweep his cheek as he took flight. Harry wanted to shout, "Don't leave us!" but what chance did a phoenix have against the king of serpents?

Something huge hit the stone floor of the Chamber. Harry and Hally felt it shudder--they knew what was happening, they both could sense it, could almost see the giant serpent uncoiling itself from Slytherin's mouth. Then they both heard Riddle's hissing voice:

"Kill them."

The basilisk was moving toward Harry and Hally. They could hear its heavy body slithering heavily across the dusty floor. Eyes still tightly shut, Harry took hold of his sister's hand and began to run blindly sideways, his hand outstretched, feeling his way for them--Voldemort was laughing--

Harry tripped with Hally toppling above him, letting out a squeak. Harry fell hard onto the stone and tasted blood--the serpent was barely feet away from them, they could hear it coming--

There was a loud, explosive spitting sound right above them, and then something heavy hit Harry and Hally so hard that they both were smashed into the wall. Waiting for fangs to sink through their bodies, they heard more mad hissing, something thrashing wildly off the pillars--

They couldn't help it--they opened their eyes wide enough to squint at what was going on.

The enormous serpent, bright, poisonous green, thick as an oak trunk, had raised itself high in the air and its great blunt head was weaving drunkenly between the pillars. As both twins trembled, ready to close their eyes if it turned, they saw what had distracted the snake.

Fawkes was soaring around its head, and the basilisk was snapping furiously at him with fangs long and thin as sabers--

Fawkes dived. Its long golden beak sank out of sight and a sudden shower of dark blood splattered the floor. The snake's tail thrashed, narrowly missing Harry and Hally, and before both twins could shut their eyes, it turned--both twins looked straight into its face and saw that its eyes, both its great, bulbous yellow eyes, had been punctured by the phoenix; blood was streaming to the floor, and the snake was spitting in agony.

"NO!" Harry and Hally heard Riddle screaming. "LEAVE THE BIRD! LEAVE THE BIRD! THE BOY AND GIRL IS BEHIND YOU! YOU CAN STILL SMELL THEM! KILL THEM!"

The blinded serpent swayed, confused, still deadly. Fawkes was circling its head, piping his eerie song, jabbing here and there at its scaly nose as the blood poured from its ruined eyes.

"Oh my gods," Hally breathed over the size of the snake.

"Help us, help us," Harry muttered wildly, "someone--anyone--"

The snake's tail whipped across the floor again. Both Harry and Hally ducked. Something soft hit Harry's face.

The basilisk has swept the Sorting Hat into Harry's arms. Harry seized it. It was all they had left, their only chance--he rammed it onto his head and threw himself flat onto the floor bringing Hally with him as the basilisk's tail swung over them again.

Help us--help us--Harry thought, his eyes screwed tight under the hat. Please help us--

There was no answering voice. Instead, the hat contracted, as though an invisible hand was squeezing it very tightly.

Something very hard and heavy thudded onto the top of Harry's head, almost knocking him out. Stars winking in front of his eyes, he grabbed the top of the hat to pull it off and felt something long and hard beneath it.

"Totally wicked!" Hally exclaimed in awe on the object on top of Harry's head.

A gleaming silver sword had appeared inside the hat, its handle glittering with rubies the size of eggs.

"KILL THE BOY AND GIRL! LEAVE THE BIRD! THE BOY AND GIRL IS BEHIND YOU! SNIFF--SMELL THEM!"

Harry was on his feet ready, keeping Hally behind him. The basilisk's head was falling, its body coiling around, hitting pillars as it twisted to face them. They both could see the vast, bloody eye sockets, see the mouth stretching wide, wide enough to swallow him whole, lined with fangs long as Harry's sword, thin, glittering, venomous--

It lunged blindly--Harry dodged and it hit the chamber wall. It lunged again, and its forked tongue lashed Harry's side. He raised the sword in both his hands--

The basilisk lunged again, and this time its aim was true--Harry threw his whole weight behind the sword and drove it to the hilt into the roof of the serpent's mouth--realizing suddenly that his twin sister Hally stepped in to help him by placing her hands over his and guiding him to his target.

But as warm blood drenched both Harry and Hally's arms, they both suddenly felt a searing pain just above their elbows. One long, poisonous fang had hit Hally's elbow making a painful cut, and slipping into Harry's elbow next, sinking deeper and deeper into his

arm and it splintered as the basilisk keeled over sideways and fell, twitching, to the floor.

Both twins slid down the wall. Harry gripped the fang that was spreading poison through his body and wrenched it out of his arm. But he knew it was too late as well as Hally did. White-hot pain was spreading slowly and steadily from the wound. Even as he dropped the fang in front of them and watched his own blood soaking his robes, his vision went foggy at the same time as Hally's. The Chamber was dissolving in a whirl of dull color.

A patch of scarlet swam past, and Harry and Hally both heard a soft clatter of claws beside them.

"Fawkes," said Harry thickly. "You were fantastic, Fawkes..."

"Fawkes is the greatest bird ever Harry," Hally commented, her voice in a slur.

"Should have stayed put..." "Your eyes were closed, and you weren't aiming in the right place Harry James..."

"Yeah and now look where it got you..."

"Oh? and what about you," Hally retorted with a whimper of pain.

"All right Hal, I know..."

Harry felt the bird lay its beautiful head on the spot where the serpent's fang had pierced him.

He could hear echoing footsteps along with Hally and then a dark shadow moved in front of them.

"You're dead Potters," said Riddle's voice above them. "Dead. Even Dumbledore's bird knows it. Do you see what he's doing, Potters? He's crying."

The twins blinked. Fawke's head slid in and out of focus. Thick, pearly tears were trickling down the glossy feathers.

"I'm going to sit here and watch you two die, Potters. Take your time. I'm in no hurry."

Harry and Hally felt drowsy. Everything around them seemed to be spinning.

"So winds the famous Harry and Hally Potter," said Riddle's distant voice. "Alone in the Chamber of Secrets, forsaken by their friends, defeated at last by the Dark Lord they so unwisely challenged. You'll be back with your dear Mudblood mother soon, Potters...She bought you two twelve years of borrowed time...but Lord Voldemort got you both in the end, as you both knew he must..."

If this is dying, thought Harry, it's not so bad. Hally could only think of ways to silence Riddle's remarks.

Even the pain was leaving them...

But was this dying? Instead of going black, the Chamber seemed to be coming back into focus. Harry and Hally gave their heads a little shake and there was Fawkes, still resting his head back on Harry's arm since he took the worst of the strike. A pearly patch of tears was shining all around the wound--except that there was no longer a wound--

"Get away, bird," said Riddle's voice suddenly. "Get away from them-- I said, get away--"

Harry and Hally raised their heads. Riddle was pointing Harry's wand at Fawkes; there was a loud bang like a gun, and Fawkes took flight again in a whirl of gold and scarlet.

"Phoenix tears..." Riddle said quietly, staring at Harry and Hally's arms. "Of course... healing powers...I forgot..."

He looked into Harry and Hally's faces. "But it makes no difference. In fact, I prefer it this way. Just you two and me, Potters...you two and me..."

He raised the wand--

Then, in a rush of wings, Fawkes had soared back overhead and something fell into Harry's lap--the diary.

For a split second, both twins, and Riddle, wand still raised, stared at it. Then, without thinking, without considering, as though they had meant to do it all along, Hally quickly handed Harry the broken fang from the floor, and watched as Harry plunged it straight into the heart of the book.

There was a long, dreadful, piercing scream. Ink spurted out of the diary in torrents, streaming over Harry's hands, flooding the floor. Riddle was writhing and twisting, screaming and flailing and then--

He had gone. Harry's wand fell to the floor with a clatter and there was silence. Silence except for the steady drip drip of ink stil oozing from the diary. The basilisk venom had burned a sizzling hole right through it.

Shaking all over, Harry and Hally pulled themselves up. Their heads was spinning as though they had just traveled miles by Floo Powder. Slowly, Harry gathered together his wand and the Sorting Hat, and, with a huge tug, retrieved the glittering sword from the roof of the basilisk's mouth.

Then came a faint moan from the end of the Chamber. Ginny was stirring. As Harry and Hally both hurried toward her, she sat up. Her bemused eyes traveled from the huge form of the dead basilisk, over the twins, in their blood-soaked robes, then to the diary in Harry's hand. She drew a great, shuddering gasp and tears began to pour down her face.

"Harry, Hally--oh, Harry, Hally--I tried to tell you both at b-breakfast, but I c-couldn't say it in front of Percy--it was me, you two--but I--I s-swear I d-didn't mean to--R-Riddle made me, he t-took me over--and--how did you kill that-that thing? W-where's Riddle? The last thing I r-remember is him coming out of the diary--"

Hally knelt down beside Ginny, putting her arm around her shoulder for comfort.

"It's all right," said Harry, holding up the diary, and showing Ginny the fang hole, "Riddle's finished. Look! Him and the basilisk. C'mon, Ginny, let's get out of here--"

"I'm going to be expelled!" Ginny wept as Harry and Hally helped her awkwardly to her feet. "I've looked forward to coming to Hogwarts ever since B-Bill came and n-now I'll have to leave and--w-what'll Mum and Dad say?"

Fawkes was waiting for them, hovering in the Chamber entrance. The twins urged Ginny forward; they stepped over the motionless coils of the dead basilisk, through the echoing gloom, and back into the tunnel. Harry and Hally heard the stone doors close behind them with a soft hiss.

After a few minutes' progress up the dark tunnel, a distant sound of slowly shifting rock reached Harry and Hally's ears.

"Ron!" Harry yelled, speeding up with Hally and Ginny. "Ginny's okay! We've got her!"

They heard Ron give a strangled cheer, and they turned the next bend to see his eager face staring straight through the sizable gap he and Blaise had managed to make in the rock fall.

"Ginny!" Ron thrust an arm through the gap in the rock to pull her through first. "You're alive! I don't believe it! What happened?" How--what--where did that bird come from?"

Fawkes had swooped through the gap after Ginny.

"He's Dumbledore's," both twins replied, squeezing through themselves one at a time.

"How come you got a sword Harry?" Ron asked, gaping at the glittering weapon in Harry's hand.

"I'll explain when we get out of here," said Harry with a sideways glance at Ginny who was crying even harder than ever.

"But--"

"Later," said Harry shortly. He nor Hally thought it was a good idea to tell Ron yet who'd been opening the Chamber, not in front of Ginny, anyway. "Where's Lockhart?"

"Back there," Ron answered, still looking puzzled but jerking his head up the tunnel toward the pipe. "He's in a bad way. Come and see."

Led by Fawkes, whose wide scarlet wings emitted a soft golden glow in the darkness, they walked all the way back to the mouth of the pipe. Gideroy Lockhart was sitting there with Blaise keeping an eye on him shaking her head as he was humming placidly to himself.

"His memory's gone," said Ron. "The Memory Charm backfired. Hit him instead of us. Hasn't got a clue who he is, or where he is, or who we are. I told him to come and wait here. He's a danger to himself."

Lockhart peered good-naturedly up at them all.

"Hello," he said. "Odd sort of place, isn't it? Do you live here?"

"No," said Ron, Raising his eyebrows at the twins.

Harry and Hally bent down and looked up the long, dark pipe.

"Have you thought how we're going to get back up this?" Harry said to Ron.

Ron shook his head, but Fawkes the phoenix had swooped past Harry and Hally and was now fluttering in front of them, his beady bright eyes in the dark. He was waving his long golden tail feathers. Harry looked uncertainly at him.

"What's wrong Harry, scared to fly with Fawkes?" Hally teased her brother

"Oh and I suppose that you've done it before, Hally," Ron rolled his eyes.

"Actually I have many times," Hally confessed. Harry still wasn't convinced.

"He looks like he wants you to grab hold..." Ron said, looking perplexed. "But you're much too heavy for a bird to pull up there--"

"Fawkes," said Harry, "Isn't an ordinary bird." he turned quickly to the others. "We've got to hold on to each other. Ginny, grab Ron's hand. Blaise, grab Hally's hand, Professor Lockhart--"

"He means you," said Ron sharply to Lockhart.

"You hold Ginny's other hand--"

Harry tucked the sword and the Sorting Hat into his belt, Ron took hold of the back of Blaise's robes while each one took each other's hands, and Harry reached out and took hold of Fawkes's strangely hot tail feathers.

"Mind his burning wings Harry," Hally warned her big brother.

An extraordinary lightness seemed to spread through his whole body and the next second, in a rush of wings, they were flying upward through the pipe. Harry and Hally could hear Lockhart dangling below them saying, "Amazing! Amazing! This is just like magic!"

The chill air was whipping through twins' hair, and before they'd stopped enjoying the ride, it was over--all six of them were hitting the wet floor of Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, and as Lockhart straightened his hat, the sink that hid the pipe was sliding back into place.

Myrtle goggled at them.

"You're alive," she said blankly to the twins.

"There's no need to sound so disappointed," they both said grimly, noticing the blood and slime on their robes.

"Oh, well...I'd just been thinking...if you had died, you'd have been welcome to share my toilet," said Myrtle, blushing silver.

"Urgh!" said Ron as they left the bathroom for the dark, deserted corridor outside. "Harry! I think Myrtle's grown fond of you! You've got competition, Ginny!"

But tears were still flooding silently down Ginny's face.

"I told you she had a crush Harry," Hally commented.

"Where now?" said Ron, with an anxious look at Ginny. Harry and Hally pointed.

Fawkes was leading the way, glowing gold along the corridor. They all strode after him, and moments later, found themselves outside Professor McGonagall's office.

The twins knocked and pushed the door open.

A/N: that is all for chapter 28. see you in chapter 29 bye for now.

Chapter 29 DOBBY'S REWARD AND MORE

For a moment there was silence as Harry, Hally, Blaise, Ron, Ginny and Lockhart stood in the doorway, covered in muck and slime and (in both Harry and Hally's case) blood. Then there was a scream.

"Ginny!"

It was Mrs. Weasley, who had been sitting crying in front of the fire. She leapt to her feet, closely followed by Mr. Weasley, and both of them flung themselves on their daughter.

The twins, however, was looking past them. Professor Dumbledore was standing by the mantelpiece, beaming, next to Professor McGonagall, who was taking great, steadying gasps, clutching her chest. Fawkes went whooshing past between the twins' ears and settled on Dumbledore's shoulder, just as Harry found himself, Hally, Blaise and Ron being swept into Mrs. Weasley's tight embrace.

"You saved her! You saved her! How did you do it?"

"I think we'd all like to know that," said Professor McGonagall weakly.

Mrs. Weasley let go of the twins, who were hesitating for a moment, then walked over to the desk while Harry laid upon it the Sorting Hat, the ruby-encrusted sword, and what remained of Riddle's diary.

They both started telling them everything. For nearly a quarter of an hour they spoke one at a time into the rapt silence. They told them about hearing the disembodied voice, how Hermione had finally realized that they were hearing a basilisk in the pipes; how they, Blaise, and Ron had followed the spiders into the forest, that Aragog had told them where the last victim of the basilisk had died; how they had guessed that Moaning Myrtle had been the victim, and that the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets might be in her bathroom....

"Very well," Professor McGonagall prompted them as they paused. "So you two found out where the entrance was—breaking a hundred school rules into pieces along the way. I might add—but how on earth did you all get out of there alive, Potters?"

So Harry and Hally, their voices now growing hoarse from all this talking, told them one at a time about Fawkes's timely arrival and about the Sorting Hat giving Harry the sword. But then they both faltered. They had so far avoided mentioning Riddle's diary—or Ginny. She was standing with her head against Mrs. Weasley's shoulder, and tears were still coursing silently down her cheeks. What if they expelled her? Both Harry and Hally thought in a panic. Riddle's diary didn't work anymore....How could they prove it had been he who'd made her do it all?

Instinctively, Harry and Hally looked at Dumbledore, who smiled faintly, the firelight glancing off his half-moon spectacles.

"What interests me most," said Dumbledore gently, "Is how Lord Voldemort managed to enchant Ginny, when my sources tell me he is currently in hiding in the forests of Albania."

Relief—warm, sweeping, glorious relief—swept over Harry and Hally both.

"W-what's that?" Mr. Weasley said in a stunned voice. "You-know-who? En-enchant Ginny? But Ginny's not...Ginny hasn't been...has she?"

"It was this diary," said the twins quickly at once, while Harry picked it up and showed it to Dumbledore. "Riddle wrote it when he was sixteen...."

Dumbledore took the diary from Harry and peered keenly down his long, crooked nose at its burnt and soggy pages.

"Brilliant," he said softly. "Of course, he was probably the most brilliant student Hogwarts has ever seen." He turned around to the Weasleys, who were looking utterly bewildered.

"Very few people know that Lord Voldemort was once called Tom Riddle. I taught him myself, fifty years ago, at Hogwarts. He was barely recognizable. Hardly anyone connected Lord Voldemort with the clever, handsome boy who was once Head Boy here."

“But, Ginny,” said Mrs. Weasley. “What’s our Ginny got to do with—with—him?”

“His d-diary!” Ginny sobbed. “I’ve b-been writing in it, and he’s been w-writing back all year—

“Ginny!” said Mr. Weasley, flabbergasted. “Haven’t I taught you anything? What have I always told you? Never trust anything that can think for itself if you can’t see where it keeps its brain? Why didn’t you show the diary to me, or your mother? A suspicious object like that, it was clearly full of Dark Magic—

“I d-didn’t know,” sobbed Ginny. “I found it inside one of the books Mum got me. I th-thought someone had just left it in there and forgotten about it—

“Miss Weasley should go up to the hospital wing right away,” Dumbledore interrupted in a firm voice. “This has been a terrible ordeal for her. There will be no punishment. Older and wiser wizards than she have been hoodwinked by Lord Voldemort.” He strode over to the door and opened it. “Bed rest and perhaps a large steaming mug of hot chocolate. I always find that cheers me up,” he added, twinkling kindly down at her. “You will find that Madam Pomfrey is still awake. She’s just giving out Mandrake juice—I daresay the basilisk’s victims will be waking up any moment.”

“So Hermione’s okay!” said Ron brightly.

“There has been no lasting harm done, Ginny,” said Dumbledore.

Mrs. Weasley led Ginny out, and Mr. Weasley followed, still looking deeply shaken.

“You know Minerva,” Professor Dumbledore said thoughtfully to Professor McGonagall, “I think all this merits a good feast. Might I ask you to go and alert the kitchens?”

“Right,” said Professor McGonagall crisply, also moving to the door. “I’ll leave you to deal with the Potters, Zabini, and Weasley, shall I?”

"Um....I'll just stay with Ginny if that's okay?" Blaise piped up

"Certainly," Said Dumbledore, watching Blaise being led out by Professor McGonagall.

They both left, and Harry, Hally, and Ron gazed uncertainly at Dumbledore. What exactly had Professor McGonagall meant, deal with them? Surely—surely—they weren't about to be punished?

"I seem to remember telling you three that I would have to expel you if you broke any more school rules," said Dumbledore.

Ron opened his mouth in horror.

"Which goes to show that the best of us must sometimes ear our words,"Dumbledore went on, smiling. "You three will receive Special Awards for Services to the school and—let me see—yes, I think two hundred points apiece for Gryffindor....and since Miss Zabini decided to leave us and keep Miss Weasley company two hundred points may also go to her house as well as a Special Award for Services to the school.

Ron went as brightly pink as Lockhart's valentine flowers and closed his mouth again.

"But one of us seems to be keeping mightily quiet about his part in this dangerous adventure," Dumbledore added. "Why do modest Gilderoy?"

Harry and Hally gave a start. They had completely forgotten about Lockhart. They both turned and saw Lockhart was standing in a corner of the room, still wearing his vague smile. When Dumbledore addressed him, Lockhart looked over his shoulder to see who he was talking to.

"Professor Dumbledore," Ron said quickly, "there was an accident down in the Chamber of Secrets. Professor Lockhart--"

"Am I a Professor?" said Lockhart in mild surprise. "Goodness. I expect I was hopeless, was I?"

"He tried to do a Memory Charm and the wand backfired," Ron explained quietly to Dumbledore.

"Dear me," said Dumbledore, shaking his head, his long silver mustache quivering. "Impaled upon your own sword, Gilderoy!"

"Sword?" said Lockhart dimly. "Haven't got a sword. That boy has, though." He pointed at Harry. "He'll lend you one."

"Actually it was with Ron's own broken wand, Professor." Hally stifled a giggle.

"Indeed. Would you mind taking Professor Lockhart up to the infirmary, too?" Dumbledore said to Ron. "I'd like a few more words with Harry and Hally..."

Lockhart ambled out. Ron cast a curious look back at Dumbledore, Harry and Hally as he closed the door.

Dumbledore crossed to one of the chairs by the fire.

"Sit down, Harry, Hally," he said, and both twins sat, feeling unaccountably nervous.

"First of all, Harry and Hally, I want to thank you both," said Dumbledore, eyes twinkling again. "You both must have shown me real loyalty down in the Chamber. Nothing but that could have called Fawkes to you both."

He stroked the phoenix, which had fluttered down onto his knee. Harry and Hally grinned awkwardly as Dumbledore watched them.

"And so you two met Tom Riddle," said Dumbledore thoughtfully. "I imagine he was most interested in the two of you..."

Suddenly, something that was nagging at the twins, came tumbling out of Harry's mouth.

"Professor DUmbleDore...Riddle said we're like him. Strange likenesses, he said..."

"Did he now?" said Dumbledore, looking thoughtfully at Harry from under his thick silver eyebrows. "And what do you think, Harry?"

"I don't think that we're like him!" said Harry, more loudly than he'd intended. "I mean, we're, we-we're in Gryffindor, we..."

But Harry fell silent, a lurking doubt resurfacing in his mind as well as Hally's.

"Professor," Harry started again after a moment. "The sorting Hat told us that we'd--we'd have done well in Slytherin. Everyone thought we were Slytherin's heir for a while...because we can speak Parseltongue..."

"You both can speak Parseltongue, Harry," said Dumbledore calmly, "because Lord Voldemort--who is the last remaining ancestor of Salazar Slytherin--can speak Parseltongue. Unless I'm much mistaken, he transferred some of his own powers to you two the night he gave you both those scars. Not something he intended to do, I'm sure..."

"Voldemort put a bit of himself in us?" both twins said thunderstruck.

"It certainly seems so."

"So we should be in Slytherin," said Harry, looking desperately into Dumbledore's face. "The Sorting Hat could see Slytherin's power in us, and it--"

"Put you both in Gryffindor," said Dumbledore calmly. "Listen to me Harry, Hally. You two happen to have many qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his hand-picked students. His own very rare gift, Parseltongue--resourcefulness--determination--a certain disregard for rules," he add, his mustache quivering again. "Yet the Sorting Hat placed you two in Gryffindor. You know why that was. Think."

"It only put me in Gryffindor," said Harry in a defeated voice, "because I asked not to go to Slytherin..."

"It put me there," said Hally thoughtfully, "Because it told me that Harry would need me when the time comes..."

"Exactly," said Dumbledore, beaming once more. "Which make you both very different from Tom Riddly. It is our choices, Harry and Hally, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities. Although sometimes we don't always get placed where we ask for." Both twins sat motionless in their chairs, stunned. "If you want proof, Harry, I suggest you look more closely at this."

Dumbledore reached across to Professor McGonagall's desk, picked up the blood-stained silver sword, and handed it to Harry. Dully, Harry turned it over, the rubies blazing in the firelight. And then he saw the name engraved just below the hilt as well as Hally, who leaned closer to him to take a look herself.

Godric Gryffindor

"Only a true Gryffindor could have pulled that out of the hat, Harry," said Dumbledore simply. "Including Hally, if it was she that the Sorting Hat was with."

For a minute, neither of the three spoke. Then Dumbledore pulled out one of the drawers in Professor McGonagall's desk and took out a quill and a bottle of ink.

"What you two need, Harry, Hally, is some food and sleep. I suggest you both go down to the feast, while I write to Azkaban--we need our gamekeeper back. And I must draft an advertisement for the Daily Prophet, too," he added thoughtfully. "We'll be needing a new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher...Dear me, we do seem to run through them, don't we?"

Harry and Hally got up and crossed the door. Harry had just reached for the handle first, however, when the door burst open so violently that it bounced back off the wall.

Lucius Malfoy stood there, fury in his face. And cowering behind his legs, heavily wrapped in bandages, was Dobby.

"Good evening Lucius," said Dumbledore pleasantly.

Mr. Malfoy almost knocked Harry over as he swept into the room, and looked down to see Hally beside her brother, taking his cane and steering her out of his way. Dobby went scurrying in after him, crouching at the hem of his cloak, a look of abject terror on his face.

The elf was carrying a stained rag with which he was attempting to finish cleaning Mr. Malfoy's shoes. Apparently Mr. Malfoy had set out in a great hurry, for not only were his shoes half-polished, but his usually sleek hair was disheveled. Ignoring the elf bobbing apologetically around his ankles, he fixed his cold eyes upon Dumbledore.

"So!" he said "You've come back. The governors suspended you, but you still saw fit to return to Hogwarts."

"well, you see, Lucius," said Dumbledore, smiling serenely, "the other eleven governors contacted me today. It was something like being caught in a hailstorm of owls, to tell the truth. They'd heard that Arthur Weasley's daughter had been killed and wanted me back here at once. They seemed to think I was the best man for the job after all. Very strange tales they told me, too...Several of them seemed to think that you had threatened to curse their families if they didn't agree to suspend me in the first place."

Mr. Malfoy went paler than usual, but his eyes were still slits of fury.

"So-have you stopped the attacks yet?" he sneered. "Have you caught the culprit?"

"We have," said Dumbledore, with a smile.

"Well?" said Mr. Malfoy sharply. "Who is it?"

"The same person as last time, Lucius," said Dumbledore. "But this time, Lord Voldemort was acting through somebody else. By means of this diary."

He held up the small black book with the large hole through the center, watching Mr. Malfoy closely along with Hally. Harry, however, was watching Dobby.

The elf was doing something very odd. His great eyes fixed meaningfully on Harry, he kept pointing at the diary, then at Mr. Malfoy, and then hitting himself hard on the head with his fist. Harry quickly elbowed his twin sister gently in her right side, getting her attention. Hally looked down at Dobby, noticing his odd behavior next.

"I see..." said Mr. Malfoy slowly to Dumbledore.

"A clever plan," said Dumbledore in a level voice, still staring Mr. Malfoy straight in the eye. "Because if Harry and Hally here"--Mr. Malfoy shot both twins a swift, sharp look--"and their friends Ron and Blaise hadn't discovered this book, why--Ginny Weasley might have taken all the blame. No one would ever have been able to prove she hadn't acted of her own free will..."

Mr. Malfoy said nothing. His face was suddenly masklike.

"And imagine," Dumbledore went on, "What might have happened then...The Weasleys are one of our most prominent pure-blood families. Imagine the effect on Arthur Weasley and his Muggle Protection Act, if his own daughter was discovered attacking and killing Muggle-borns...very fortunate the diary was discovered, and Riddle's memories wiped from it. Who knows what the consequences might have been otherwise..."

forced himself to speak.

"Very Fortunate," he said stiffly.

And still, behind his back, Dobby was pointing, first to the diary, then to Lucius Malfoy, then punching himself in the head.

And Harry and Hally both suddenly understood. They nodded at Dobby, and Dobby backed into a corner, now twisting his ears in punishment.

It was Harry who chose to speak for Hally and Hissself by using their mind link swiftly, telling Hally not to do anything rash for their dad's sake knowingly.

"Don't you want to know how Ginny got hold of that diary, Mr. Malfoy?" Harry said

Lucius Malfoy rounded on him.

"How should I know how the stupid girl got hold of it?" he said

"Because you gave it to her," said Harry. "In Flourish and Blotts. You picked up her old Transfiguration book and slipped the diary inside it, didn't you?"

Hally's eyes went wide as she and Harry saw Mr. Malfoy's white hands clench and unclench.

"Prove it," he hissed

"Oh, no one will be able to do that," said Dumbledore, smiling at Harry and Hally. "Not now that Riddle has vanished from the book. On the other hand, I would advise you, Lucius, not to go giving out any more of Lord Voldemort's old school things. I think Arthur Weasley, for one, will make sure they are traced back to you..."

Lucius Malfoy stood for a moment, and Harry and Hally distinctly saw his right hand twitch as though he was longing to reach for his wand. Instead, he turned to his house-elf.

"We're going, Dobby!"

He wrenched open the door and as the elf came hurrying up to him, he kicked him right through it. They could hear Dobby squealing with pain all the way along the corridor. Harry stood for a moment with

Hally, thinking hard. Then it suddenly came to him. Hally snapped her head his way...

"No, Harry No! You can't..."

"Yes I can Hal. You can watch at a safe distance, but we owe him." Harry intervened then looked at Dumbledore. "Professor Dumbledore, can I give that diary back to Mr. Malfoy, please?"

"Certainly, Harry," said Dumbledore calmly. "But hurry. The feast, remember..."

Harry grabbed the diary and both twins dashed out of the office with Hally following her brother at a safe distance from his request. They could hear Dobby's squeals of pain receding around the corner. Quickly, wondering if this plan could possibly work, Harry took off one of his shoes, pulled off his slimy, filthy sock, and stuffed the diary into it. They he ran down the dark corridor with Hally lagging behind on purpose.

He caught up with them at the top of the stairs. Hally was still deliberately trying to catch up, but could see and would be able to hear everything.

"Mr. Malfoy," Harry gasped, skidding to a halt. "I've got something for you--"

And he forced the smelly sock into Lucius Malfoy's hand.

"What the--?"

Mr. Malfoy ripped the sock off the diary, threw it aside, then looked furiously from the ruined book to Harry. Hally slowed her steps, stopped beside Harry with the look of innocence on her face.

"You'll meet the same sticky end as your parents one of these days, Harry Potter," he said softly. "They were meddlesome fools, too. It seems that skipped your sister immensely."

He turned to go.

"Come Dobby. I said, come."

But Dobby didn't move. He was holding up Harry's disgusting slimy sock, and looking at it as though it were a priceless treasure.

"Master had given a sock," said the elf in wonderment. "Master gave it to Dobby."

"What's that?" spat Mr. Malfoy. "What did you say?"

"Got a sock," said Dobby in disbelief. "Master threw it, and Dobby caught it, and Dobby--Dobby is free."

Lucius stood frozen, staring at the elf. Then he lunged at Harry while Hally snapped her head back with wide eyes.

"You've lost me my servant, boy!"

But Dobby shouted, "You shall not harm Harry or Hally Potter!"

There was a loud bang, and Mr. Malfoy was thrown backward. He crashed down the stairs, three at a time, landing in a crumpled heap on the landing below. He got up, his face livid, and pulled out his wand, but Dobby raised a long, threatening finger.

"You shall go now," he said fiercely, pointing down at Mr. Malfoy. "You shall not touch Harry nor Hally Potter. You shall go now."

Lucius Malfoy had no choice. With a last, incensed stare at the three of them, one being Hally looking down at him with her mouth open in shock, Lucius swung his cloak around him and hurried out of sight, but not before looking back up at Hally.

"Tell you father young lady, that my family will be visiting yours within a week of the beginning of the summer holiday, over...SpinnersEnd," Lucius announced before quickly heading out of sight.

"Harry Potter freed Dobby!" said the elf shrilly, gazing up at the twins one-at-a-time, moonlight from the nearest window reflected in his orb-like eyes. "Harry Potter set Dobby free!"

"Yeah, without thinking f...mfft!" Hally's eyes lit up with laughter after Harry covered her mouth grinning.

"Least I could do, Dobby," Said Harry grinning. "Just promise us both to never try and our lives again."

The elf's ugly brown face split suddenly into a wide, toothy smile.

"I've just got one question, Dobby," said Harry as Dobby pulled on Harry's sock with shaking hands. "You told us all this had nothing to do with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, remember? Well--"

"It was a clue, sir," said Dobby, his eyes widening, as though this was obvious. "Was giving you a clue. The Dark Lord, before he changed his name, could be freely named, you see?"

"Right," said Harry weakly. "Well, we'd better go. There's a feast, and our friend Hermione should be awake by now..."

Dobby threw his arms around the twins's middles and hugged one at a time.

"Harry and Hally Potter is greater by far than Dobby knew!" he sobbed. "Farewell Harry and Hally Potter!"

And with a final loud crack, Dobby disappeared.

The twins had been to several Hogwarts feasts, but never one quite like this. Everybody was in their pajamas, and the celebration lasted all night. Harry and Hally didn't know whether the best bit was Hermione running towards them, screaming "You solved it! You both solved it!" or Justin hurrying over from the Hufflepuff table to wring his hand and apologize endlessly for suspecting them, or Hagrid turning up at half past three, cuffing Harry, Hally, and Ron so hard on the shoulders that they were knocked into their plates of trifle, or his, Hally's and Ron's six hundred points for Gryffindor securing the

House Cup for the second year running, or Professor McGonagall standing up to tell them all that the exams had been canceled as a school treat (Oh, no!" said Hermione), or Dumbledore announcing that, unfortunately, Professor Lockhart would be unable to return next year, owing to the fact that he needed to go away and get his memory back. Quite a few of the teachers joined in the cheering that greeted this news.

"Shame," said Ron, helping himself to a jam doughnut. "He was starting to grow on me."

The only part of the feast that upsetted Hally the most was, she kept craning her neck for any sign of Mr. Filch to see if Mrs. Norris was fine. She sighed quietly moments later after realizing that she wouldn't be seeing Mrs. Norris at the feast.

Later that evening, after both twins had fallen asleep with their luck dragons by their feet, their door to their spare room inside Severus quarters opened up silently while four professors and one groundskeeper watched with amusement as a certain feline trotted into the room, and leaped onto Hally's bed walking towards Hally's sleeping face.

Mrs. Norris crept up to Hally, purring contentedly, rubbing her head against Hally's face.

Hally stirred in her sleep. "Okay Silver, hang on..." "Meow" Hally opened her eyes to find Mrs. Norris looking at her intently.

"Mrs. Norris, your awake," Hally grinned waking up her brother.

"Oh man I thought we had seen the last of her," Harry teased with a grin.

"Harry..." "Kidding Hal. Good to see you better Mrs. Norris," Harry yawned, going back to sleep while Hally snuggled into a comfortable position with Mrs. Norris laying beside her.

The rest of the final term passed in a haze of blazing sunshine. Hogwarts was back to normal with only a few, small differences--

Defense Against the Dark Arts classes were canceled ("but we've had plenty of practice at that anyway," Ron told a disgruntled Hermione) and Lucius Malfoy had been sacked as a school governor. Draco was no longer strutting around the school as though he owned the place. On the contrary, he looked resentful and sulky. On the other hand, Ginny Weasley was perfectly happy again and soon became a part of a group of girls that Hally was in charge of when the twins decided to separate for a short while.

Too soon, it was time for the journey home on the Hogwarts express, Severus giving the twins permission to ride back with their friends as a special treat. Harry, Hally, Ron, Blaise, Hermione, Ginny, Fred, and George got a compartment to themselves. They made the most of the last few hours in which they were allowed to do magic before the holidays. They played Exploding Snap, set off the very last of Fred and George's Filibuster fireworks, and practiced disarming each other by magic. Both twins were getting way better at it.

They were almost at King's cross when the twins remembered something.

"Ginny--what did you see Percy doing, that he didn't want you to tell anyone?"

"Oh, that," said Ginny, giggling. "Well--Percy's got a girlfriend."

Fred dropped a stack of books on George's head.

"What?"

"It's that Ravenclaw prefect, Penelope Clearwater," said Ginny. "That's who he was writing to all last summer. He's been meeting her all over the school in secret. I walked in on them kissing in an empty classroom one day. He was so upset when she was--you know--attacked. You won't tease him, will you?" she added anxiously.

"Wouldn't dream of it," said Fred, who was looking like his birthday had come early.

"Definitely not," said George, sniggering.

The Hogwarts Express slowed and finally stopped.

Harry pulled out his quill and a bit of parchment and turned to Ron and Hermione.

"Here, this is called a telephone number," he told Ron, scribbling it twice, tearing the parchment in two, and handing it to them. "I told your dad and ours how to use a telephone last summer--he'll know. Call us at our house."

"Sure thing Harry," Ron promised as they headed back through the gateway to the Muggle world.

Severus Snape sat at his desk inside his home, relaxing at last from a long year. Screech popped into the living parlor serving his master's tea.

"Thank you, screech. Where are my devious twins?" Severus enquired as he stirred his tea

"Outside Master, riding around in the forest with the families new car," Screech answered beaming happily while out in the families forest, the twins were squealing, laughing and having a great time while the family car drove them through the forest, honking its horn happily.

A/N: That is all with the second year book everyone. See you all in book three starting next week bye for now .